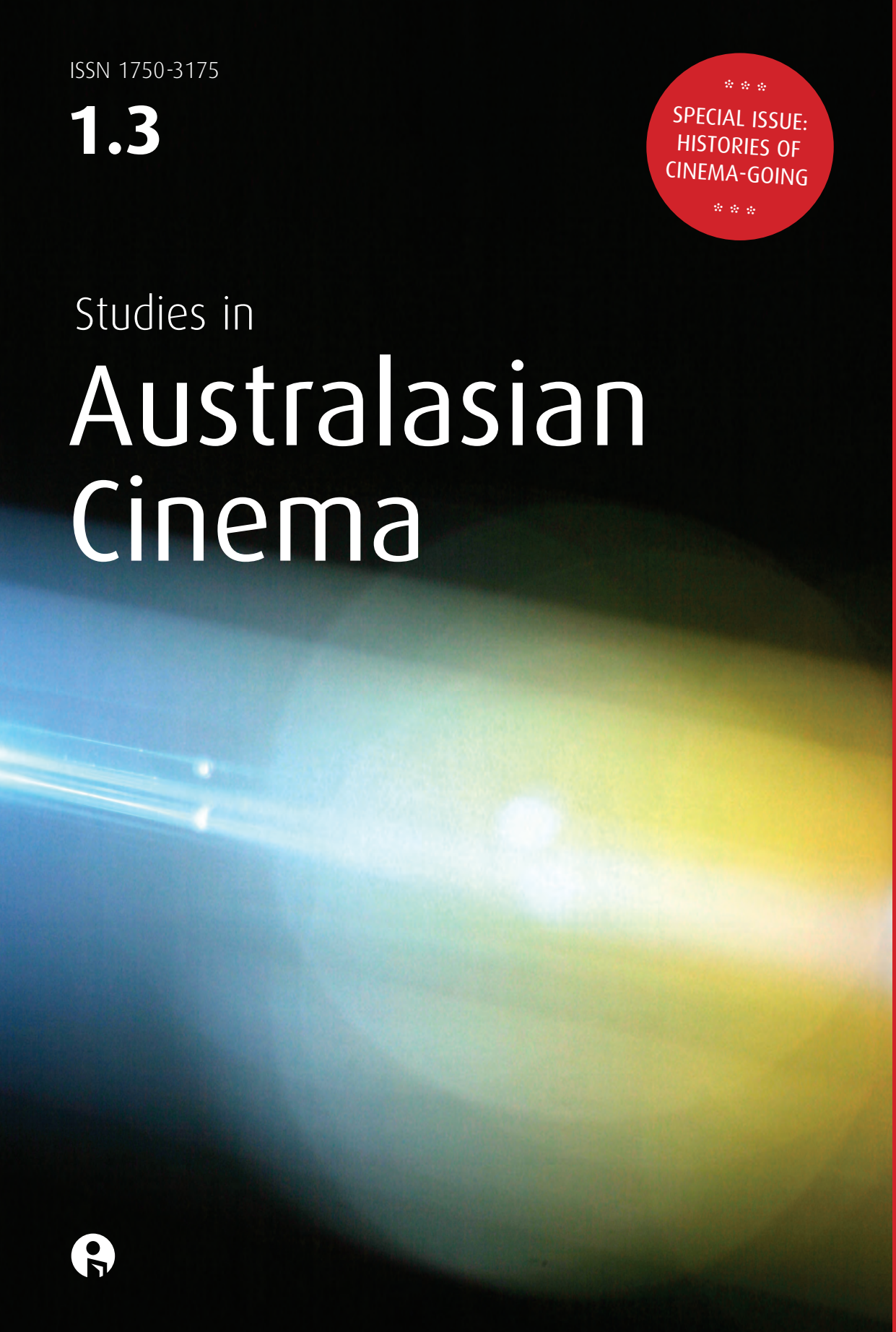
ISSN 1750-3175

1.3

SPECIAL ISSUE: HISTORIES OF CINEMA-GOING

Studies in Australasian Cinema



Volume One Number Three

intellect Journals | Film Studies

Studies in Australasian Cinema

Volume 1 Number 3 2007

The scope of *Studies in Australasian Cinema* (*SAC*)

Studies in Australasian Cinema is a new international refereed scholarly journal devoted to cinema from the Australian, New Zealand and Pacific regions. These regions are home to many Indigenous nations and immigrant cultures from all around the world. *Studies in Australasian Cinema* will maintain an emphasis on this diversity with a special interest in postcolonial politics and contexts. *Studies in Australasian Cinema* will also pay equal heed to articles addressing independent and/or 'local' films and discussions of global commercial cinema produced and/or screened in the region. Interest in independent cinema's challenge to mainstream views will run alongside recognition of the complexity and cultural potency of commercial popular film.

The journal calls for academic articles on all aspects of the region's rich cinema culture. Major articles (5000–8000 words) should include original work of a research and/or developmental nature and/or proposed new methods that are clearly and thoroughly presented and argued; in exceptional cases longer articles may be considered. Shorter items (1000–2500 words) include reports on film festivals; reports on conferences; and book reviews. Prospective guest editors may approach the editor with a proposal for a themed issue or series. Prospective book reviewers and publishers should approach the Editor directly.

Journal Editor

Dr Ian Henderson
Menzies Centre
for Australian Studies,
King's College London
Australia Centre,
Cnr Strand & Melbourne Place
London WC2B 4LG, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7557 7161
E-mail: ian.r.henderson@kcl.ac.uk

Editorial Board

Dr Kate Bowles – University of Wollongong
Dr Bernadette Brennan – University of Sydney
Dr Felicity Collins – La Trobe University
Dr Ian Conrich – New Zealand Studies Centre, Birkbeck
Dr Ian Craven – University of Glasgow
Dr Therese Davis – Monash University
Professor Robert Dixon – University of Sydney
Dr Catherine Ellis – University of Hudderfield
Dr David Ellison – Griffith University
Dr Ben Goldsmith – Australian Film, Television and Radio School
Dr Catherine Kevin – Flinders University
Dr Geoff Lealand – University of Waikato
Dr Elizabeth McMahon – University of New South Wales
Professor Richard Maltby – Flinders University
Dr Nicole Moore – Macquarie University
Professor Meaghan Morris – Lingnan University and University of Western Sydney
Dr Stuart Murray – Leeds University
Frances Peters-Little – Australian National University
Dr Mohit Prasad – University of the South Pacific
Dr Jonathan Rayner – University of Sheffield
Dr Brigid Rooney – University of Sydney
Dr Brian Shoesmith – Edith Cowan University
Dr Richard Smith – University of Sydney
Dr Teresia Teaiwa – Victoria University of Wellington
Professor Graeme Turner – University of Queensland
Associate Professor Deb Verhoeven – RMIT, Melbourne
Professor Elizabeth Webby – University of Sydney
Professor Lydia Wevers – Victoria University of Wellington
Professor Janet Wilson – University of Northampton

Studies in Australasian Cinema is published three times per year by Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Road, Bristol, BS16 3JG, UK. The current subscription rates are £30 (personal) and £210 (institutional). Postage is free within the UK, £5 for the rest of Europe and £10 elsewhere. Advertising enquiries should be addressed to: marketing@intellectbooks.com

ISSN 1750-3175

© 2007 Intellect Ltd. Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use or the internal or personal use of specific clients is granted by Intellect Ltd for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) in the UK or the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service in the USA provided that the base fee is paid directly to the relevant organization.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by 4edge, UK.

Notes for Contributors

General
Articles submitted to *Studies in Australasian Cinema* should be original and not under consideration by any other publication. They should be written in a clear and concise style.

Language
The journal uses standard British English. The Editors reserve the right to alter usage to these ends. Note the preference for '-ize' endings (but 'advertise' and 'compromise').

Referees
Studies in Australasian Cinema is a refereed journal. Strict anonymity is accorded to both authors and referees.

Opinion
The views expressed in *Studies in Australasian Cinema* are those of the authors, and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Editor or the Editorial Board.

Submission
- Submit the article as an e-mail attachment in Word or in Rich Text Format.
- Your article should not normally exceed 8,000 words (excluding 'Notes'), but longer pieces of up to 10,000 words may be considered.
- Your submission MUST include the following metadata on a separate page:
  - ✓ Title of article
  - ✓ Your name
  - ✓ Your institutional affiliation, including department
  - ✓ Institutional address
  - ✓ Work telephone number (please indicate if you do not want this published)
  - ✓ E-mail address (please indicate if you do not want this published)
  - ✓ An Abstract of 150–200 words; this will go onto the Intellect website
  - ✓ Up to six keywords (for indexing and abstracting services)
  - ✓ A short biography in the third person, which will be included in the journal issue

Presentation
- The title of your article should be in bold at the beginning of the file, without inverted commas.
- Please use double-spaced Times New Roman 12 point, including for the references and endnotes.
- The text should have at least 2.5 cm margins for annotation by the editorial team.
- You may send the text justified or unjustified.
- You may, if you wish, break up your text with subtitles, which should be set in ordinary text and bold, not 'all caps'.

Quotations
- Quotations must be in English.
- Quotations must be within single inverted commas. Material quoted within cited text should be in double inverted commas.
- Quotations must be within the body of the text unless they exceed approximately four lines of your text. In this case, they should be separated from the body of the text and indented.
- Omitted material should be signalled thus: [...]. Note that there are no spaces between the suspension points. However leave a space outside both square brackets.
- Avoid breaking up quotations with an insertion, for example: 'This approach to *mise-en-scène*', says MacPherson, 'is not sufficiently elaborated' (MacPherson 1998: 33).

References
- The first mention of a film in the article (except if it is in the title) should include its original title, the director's surname (not Christian name), and the year of release, thus: *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (Moffatt, 1989).
- We use the Harvard system for bibliographical references. This means that all quotations must be followed by the name of the author, the date of the publication, and the pagination, thus: (Kaes 1992: 15). PLEASE DO NOT use '(ibid.)'. Note that for quotation within the text the punctuation should follow the reference within brackets; for indented quotation the reference within brackets appears after the full stop.
- Your references refer the reader to a bibliography at the end of the article, before the endnotes. The heading should be 'References' and it should list the items alphabetically.
  Here are examples of the most likely cases:
  Anon. (1920), '*On Our Selection*: Australian Play at the Lyric', *The Times*, 25 August, p. 15.
  Battersby, J. (1980), *Cultural Policy in Australia*, Paris: UNESCO.
  Cochrane, P. and Goodman, D. (1988), 'The Great Australian Journey: Cultural Logic and Nationalism in the Postmodern World', *Australian Historical Studies*, 23: 91, pp. 21–44.
  Jacka, E. (1998), 'Australian Cinema', in J. Hill and P. Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 516–22.
  Jones, D. (1974), 'David Williamson', *Cinema Papers*, 1, January, pp. 6–9.

Please note
- Spell out in full University of Queensland Press and Oxford University Press
- 'Anon.' for items for which you do not have an author (because all items must be referenced with an author within the text)
- Year date of publication in brackets
- Commas, not full stops, between parts of item
- Surname before initial for all authors listed before bracketed date; initial before surname for editors referenced after the bracketed date
- Use (ed.) and (eds.)
- Absence of 'in' after the title of a chapter within a monograph, but please use 'in' after chapters in edited volumes
- Name of translator of a book within brackets after title and preceded by 'trans.', not 'transl.' or 'translated by'
- Absence of 'no.' for the journal number
- Colon between journal volume and number
- 'p.' or 'pp.' before page extents
- Provide page references for whole article or chapter
- Full stop at end of all references in the list

Web references
These are no different from other references; they must have an author, and that author must be referenced Harvard-style within the text. Unlike paper references, however, web pages can change, so we need a date of access as well as the full web reference. In the list of references at the end of your article, the item should read something like this:
Cassar, D. (2000), 'Culture of Difference', www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/9/symposiym.html#7, Accessed 22 March 2000.

Notes
Notes appear at the side of appropriate pages, but the numerical sequence runs throughout the article. Notes should be kept to a minimum. In general, if something is worth saying, it is worth saying in the text itself. A note will divert the reader's attention away from your argument. If you think that a note is necessary, make it as brief and to the point as possible.
Use Word's note-making facility, and ensure that your notes are endnotes, not footnotes. Place note calls outside the punctuation, so AFTER the comma or the full stop. The note call must be in superscripted Arabic (1, 2, 3).

Illustrations
Articles may be accompanied by images. It is the author's responsibility to supply images and ensure they are copyright cleared. Images should be scanned at 300 dpi resolution, saved as Tiff files, and sent electronically to the Editor at ian.r.henderson@kcl.ac.uk. Do NOT insert images into a Word document. Please ensure you insert a figure number at the appropriate position in the text, together with a caption and acknowledgement to the copyright holder or source.

Any matters concerning the format and presentation of articles not covered by the above notes should be addressed to the Editor. The guidance on this page is by no means comprehensive: it must be read in conjunction with Intellect Notes for Contributors. These notes can be referred to by contributors to any of Intellect's journals, and so are, in turn, not sufficient; contributors will also need to refer to the guidance such as this given for each specific journal. Intellect's Notes for Contributors are obtainable from www.intellect-books.com/journals, or on request from the Editor of this journal.

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Editorial. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.243/2

Guest editorial

Deb Verhoeven *RMIT*

In an article considering recent debates about film history, Richard Maltby re-poses Toby Miller's question: 'What would it take for screen studies to matter more?' and asks instead, 'What would it take for cinema history to matter more?'

Maltby's answer appears at first glance to be incongruous. For cinema history to matter more, he says, we need to shift its focus away from an exclusive interest in films *per se*: 'So long as cinema history remains solipsistically committed to medium specificity, starting and ending with the film text, then the history of entertainment will remain no more than an entertaining diversion occupying the illustrative margins of other histories' (Maltby 2006: 85). For cinema history really to matter, Maltby argues, film historians must engage with social history and adopt micro-historical research methodologies that speak to the particularity of cinema experiences or events without abandoning a capacity to 'specifically' generalise the cinema based on evidence gleaned 'from below'.

Many of the articles in this issue of *Studies in Australasian Cinema* began life as presentations at the XIII Biennial Conference of the Film and History Association of Australia and New Zealand which was co-hosted by RMIT University and Monash University in November 2006. For the first time this conference featured an identifiable strand devoted to exploring and analysing the social experience of cinema, one of four major themes at the conference. Press coverage by trade media paid considerable attention to this strand, emphasizing its 'great benefit' to the Australian film industry and in particular singling out the relevance of the argument that,

> a simplistic, generalised model of 'the Australian audience' as a unified and undifferentiated mass will not help us understand or meet Australia's cultural realities. For historians and policy makers alike, more specific research and more complex analytical models of cinema culture are required.
>
> (Ansara 2006)

The essays in this volume of *Studies in Australasian Cinema* go some way to providing these analytical models for a more specific research focus. Kate Bowles for example, in her essay '"Three miles of rough dirt road": towards an audience-centred approach to cinema studies in Australia' demonstrates how a micro-study of cinema-going in the small rural town of Cobargo might afford broader social negotiation of the meanings of Australian screen culture. Similarly Nancy Huggett's article on how strategies of self-presentation feature in oral history research also reveals the ways in which specific cinema spaces are places where the particular and the universal intersect; where cultural abstractions such as values or

memories become embodied as material interactions and vice versa. Other essays contained in this volume, in proposing this social spatialization of 'the cinema', also confront notions of the particular and the general, drawing together a cinema's everydayness – its here and now – with its potentialities and possibilities. Karen Crowe's essay on the campaigns to revitalize historic cinema spaces in country towns across New South Wales in the 1990s also invites us to consider what a cinema can be (and what it can't), who belongs there (and who doesn't), what its audiences might become when they are there (as distinct from somewhere else).

And finally, a socially informed approach to the myriad spaces of the cinema emphasizes the way that Australian cinema, for example, is continually reproduced through social practice and discourse, and through institutional activities. As the remaining essayists in this volume show, 'the national cinema' is better understood as a set of social formations that involve the activities of bodies, organizations and machines centred around specific places (cinemas) that are spatially distinct, and which also embrace particular temporal rhythms and routines that are social in manner (i.e. which would be difficult for a single individual to alter). In introducing economic, demographic or geographic forms of analysis to film history, Cryle and Johansen, Thorne, Walker, Walsh and Verhoeven all show the potential of micro-historical studies to inform an expanded notion of Australian film history (as something larger than textual studies) and point to the pragmatic value of these case studies in forging a wider idea of the Australian film industry itself (as more than a matter of film production).

Deb Verhoeven

References

Ansara, M. (2006), 'Film and History Conference: A Night at the Flicks', *Screen Hub*, 24 November, http://www.screenhub.com.au/news/shownewsarticle.asp?newsID=13433.
Accessed 10 November 2007 (members only).

Maltby, R. (2006), 'Cinema in Context: On the Prospect of Writing Cinema History from Below', in I. Blom and W. Strauven (eds), *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 9: 2, pp. 74–96.

Contributor detail

Deb Verhoeven is Associate Professor of Screen Studies at the RMIT University.
Contact: RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne 3001.
E-mail: deb.verhoeven@rmit.edu.au

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.245/1

'Three miles of rough dirt road': towards an audience-centred approach to cinema studies in Australia

Kate Bowles *University of Wollongong*

Abstract

Cinema studies in Australia has conventionally focused on the national production industry, the government policies that sustain and protect it, and the films that it has produced. The role of the Australian audience in shaping the market for Australian films is less well understood, and yet assumptions about audiences and the benefit offered to them in terms of cultural learning and national identity are embedded in policy rhetoric, and are necessarily invoked in the critique of content which accompanies a textually focused approach to the national cinema. This article proposes that Australian cinema audiences, whatever they are watching, play a more significant role in the Australian public sphere than Australian films. Drawing on oral history research conducted among rural cinema-goers in New South Wales, the article considers some of the methodological challenges and theoretical objections to an audience-centred research agenda for Australian cinema studies, and argues that the Australian case brings to international research an expanded appreciation of the diversity and locality of the global audience experience.

Keywords

audience
rural
oral history
curriculum
public sphere
cinema-going

> Our national cinema plays a vital role in our cultural heritage and in showing us what it is to be Australian. But the picture can be blurred by unruly forces including competing artistic aims, inconstant personal tastes, political vagaries, constantly changing priorities in screen education and training and technological innovations and market forces.
>
> When these forces remain unconnected, the result can be an artistically impoverished cinema and audiences who are disinclined to seek out and derive pleasure from a diverse range of films including those of their own national cinema.
>
> Screen culture, of which this series is a part, is the glue needed to stick these forces together. It's the plankton in the food-chain that feeds the imagination of our filmmakers and their audiences. It's what makes sense of the opinions, memories, responses, knowledge, and exchange of ideas about film. Above all, it is informed by a *love* of cinema.
>
> Jane Mills, *Australian Screen Classics* promotion (Currency Press 2002)

Australian film history: between screen culture and the culture industries

The story of Australian screen production can often seem like another heroic Australian history written from the position of the loser. The confidence of

Australian screen culture, on the other hand, is a national narrative that consistently sustains powerful beliefs within both policy and academic circles about the cultural success of the movies – no matter what market evidence suggests about the challenges currently facing the theatrical exhibition industry. The national archiving and collecting institutions concur: national benefit derives from knowing about the heroic past of Australian film producers and their movies. By its own description for example, the National Film and Sound Archive 'plays a key role in documenting and interpreting the Australian experience and *actively contributing to the development of Australia's audiovisual industry*' (National Film and Sound Archive 2007, emphasis mine). The drivers within the rhetoric of national benefit are simultaneously economic and cultural; there is a continuing belief that even an economically weak film industry is capable of delivering cultural benefits that are worth protecting. This generates debate, of course, but nevertheless the idea survives difficult conditions in the domestic market. Even with under 5% of domestic box office returns favouring local production, mission statements of the national and state film funding bodies continue to claim that Australian movies make a significant and constructive contribution to the formation of national identity. For example, in 2006, according to an upbeat New Year press release by the Australian Film Commission, the Australian share of domestic box office continued its modest recovery from the record low of 1.3% in 2004 to 4.6%, a recovery achieved in substantial measure by the Christmas release of the international eco-animation *Happy Feet,* and the surprising word-of-mouth success of the low-budget comedy *Kenny* (Jacobson, 2007). In its own words, the Australian Film Commission '*enriches Australia's national identity* by supporting the development of film, television and interactive media projects and their creators, promoting the availability of Australian content to Australian audiences, and cultivating and assisting the development and appreciation of Australian screen culture, locally and internationally' (AFC 2007a, emphasis mine). Underwriting all this is the presumption that local screen culture – made up of those who love cinema, rather than those who simply go along to the movies – has a celebratory and promotional role to play in backing the national cinema.

Is this the reasoning that sustains research and teaching in the field of Australian cinema studies? In a 1999 *Cinema Journal* article, Toby Miller makes the suggestion that 'the literature on and teaching of national cinemas need[s] an overhaul', and that the dominant topics used in the field 'mimic the alibis used to justify national cinemas' (Miller 1999). It is Miller's astringent identification of a complicity between research, teaching and public relations that concerns me here. How can Australian researchers and teachers make a constructive contribution to a historical understanding of Australian screen culture without necessarily becoming apologists for the Australian culture industries? Although Miller avoids nominating Australian scholarship in his article, and is in fact cautiously generalist apart from brief mentions of Britain and Bolivia, it seems unlikely that the Australian case would have been far from his thinking. Australian cinema fits the national cinema curriculum comfortably because it is such an obvious example of doomed competition with the dominant cinema in the English-language market. Secondly, there is also a continuing compatibility

with the theoretical project of literary scholarship, particularly in the context of the surviving Australian studies curriculum both in Australia and internationally; and it is for this reason as much as any that the film industry's story of boom, bust and faltering revival has been told so consistently from the perspective of the negotiation of national values within Australian movies. But more recently, the rise of cultural policy studies and the emerging cultural industries curriculum has also generated a recharged political economy of Australian cinema, for which there is a significant audience among policy-makers and the industry itself.

This convergence between the goals of research, curriculum and cultural producers resemble in some ways the disciplinary debate over the high school curriculum for Australian history (Bishop 2006). Should the education sector share the objectives of government: the fostering of civic literacies, however defined or constrained; the promotion of local product; and the marketing of the national image abroad? In part, this is a question of constituency. Our curriculum is delivered to a student community driven by vocational goals. We are teaching the history of Australian cinema to people who want to work in the local industry; and we are training a secondary industry of potential high school teachers who want to be able to analyse movies as well as novels. Increasingly, we are also delivering courses to visiting exchange students (particularly from the United States) for whom Australian cinema history is packaged as a companion to studies in Australian flora, fauna, literature and indigenous culture. All these groups are stakeholders in the heroic history of the Australian production industry, for quite practical reasons, and their interest in production is encouraged by our own disciplinary habit of thinking and talking primarily about Australian *films* – a practice that carries the risk of some side effects for our research agenda and our teaching curriculum. As Bill Routt suggests, 'No one wants to know more than they can learn in the least possible time about the dull films made here, the bad ones, and no one wants just a country or just an Australian film industry. Everybody wants something "good"' (Routt 1994).

It is tempting to imagine a counter-narrative to the Australian Screen Classics series, one that would place a bit less emphasis on the 'much-loved' and 'unique'. However, what is now less clear is the justification for focusing on Australian films at all, given their minority status within the national cultural experience of cinema. Are the disciplinary frameworks within which we operate sufficiently elastic to enable us to shift our research and teaching into the social history of the Australian cinema audience? Might we even be able to imagine a more substantial inversion: an *audience-centred* approach to cinema scholarship in Australia? The argument for this is based on historical fact: the practice of going to the movies in Australia has been regionally widespread, economically significant, relatively socially inclusive and certainly more consistent than the practice of making movies in Australia. The history of Australian cinema-going offers us an opportunity to reflect on the development of cultural and social literacies within community settings. We can now see that the Australian picture theatre has been one of a number of key cultural sites where different communities of Australians (and non-Australians) have negotiated with globalization, modernity and each other. This suggests

that it is timely to think about developing a *companion* research agenda and curriculum for Australian cinema studies focused on the socio-tactical nature of cinema attendance, as well as on its economic outcomes. But as Richard Maltby has argued, the routine exclusion of histories of cinema consumption from generalist cultural histories reveals the presumption among historians that media entertainment is of marginal interest (Maltby 2006: 81). In Australia, the effect is exaggerated by the insinuation of cultural inauthenticity that attaches to the consumption of Hollywood movies. Taken together, these have made it difficult to imagine how the history of cinema-going could become a priority either for cultural historians or, as it turns out, for Australian cinema studies (Thorne 1999: 68).

The second challenge that presents itself is that the increased understanding of the political economy of the Australian cinema industry as a whole, which has more recently justified closer attention to the Australian distribution and exhibition sectors, still does not automatically take in the audience. It is important and productive to know more about the ways in which the American cinema established its dominant position in this part of its foreign market, but the study of box office trends, for example, is not in itself the history of the audience experience. The distribution and exhibition sectors are primarily concerned with the exploitation of content, and so can only generate a conceptual model of the audience that centres on the interaction between the movie and its viewer. Following Higson (1989), Albert Moran suggests, for example, that the definition of national cinema could extend to a history of *consumption*, which could include the 'historical appropriation of cinema by the different subcultures of the national film audience' (Moran 1996: 9). Even this model has limits for our purposes, however. The consumption model presumes that what is being consumed is the content of the film, and leaves unexplored the social nature of cinema attendance among those subnational audience communities. This puts to one side the factors that have made cinema-going such a compelling cultural habit even where the quality of the film presentation has been more variable. But in order to understand more fully the eventual demand for Australian films, modest as it has been, we need first to piece together the history of Australian cinema *attendance*, and to ask questions about the uses of cinema from an audience rather than an industry perspective. As a foundation for a new approach to research and curriculum, an audience-centred approach meets the test that it can tell us something about 'what it is to be Australian', but it requires of us different methods, and takes us to different sources than we have typically used in the study of national cinemas in the past.

The third problem is the most paradoxical, and it is generated by the way in which the idea of the audience has *not* been excluded from the study of Australian cinema; but rather, a series of imaginary audiences has been installed at its heart. In other words, we have tended to explain our focus on films either on the basis of their cultural impact on an imaginary spectator, or a spectatorial position; or on the basis of their presumed appeal to a specific audience, which may be somewhat specialist in nature. Felicity Collins and Therese Davis, for example, invoke both a spectatorial position for recent Australian films that is characterized by 'shock, recognition

and trauma' (Collins and Davis 2004: 9), and a specific audience which they describe as 'generic' for particular films including *Lantana*, *The Dish* and *Moulin Rouge.* They write:

> The notion of a generic audience assumes there is a constellation of people with varying degrees of arcane knowledge derived from a shared history of viewing Australian film and television since the cultural renaissance of the 1970s.
>
> (Collins and Davis 2004: 25)

The existence of this specialist audience is critical to their analysis of the communicative repertoire of recent Australian films as part of a social imaginary grounded in trauma, as their argument depends to a degree on establishing the validity of a witnessing perspective that shares their interpretation. Some of the evidence of this shared perspective is drawn from critical commentary; some of it comes from remarks about 'the market' based on the structure and apparent intentions of the films themselves, particularly in terms of other films they seem to resemble. But some of it is candidly speculative:

> For the attentive, generic audience of Australian cinema after *Mabo*, the Australian flavour in commercial-industrial films *might well be* those figures of landscape and character, milieu and habitat that resonate with the complex shifts in the social imaginary accompanying the shifts in economic policy and cultural rhetoric deployed under the banner of the Hawke-Keating governments. […] The unexpected critical success of *Lantana suggests that the* film stole the AFI awards from both *Moulin Rouge* and *The Dish* because it offered its generic audience a more complex response to the anxieties of the urban middle class, broadly represented as inclusive of suburban battlers, at one end, and the cosmopolitan literati at the other.
>
> (Collins and Davis 2004: 37, emphasis mine)

What interests me here is the exceptional nature of this attentive generic audience, weighted as it is towards an urban middle class which includes the neo-battler of the Howard years, alongside the art-house movie-lover, the professional critic and, by implication, the voting member of the Australian Film Institute. This encapsulates the problem faced by both the Australian film industry and those of us who teach and write about it: that if Australian cinema is a message cinema of any kind, then the complexity of its message is reaching only that fraction of the national market who make up its generic audience. Collins and Davis have added an important dimension here to the way in which we use box office to represent the local audience, when it more correctly represents the local market. Their description of the generic audience reminds us that by definition a genre audience is one that has developed a habit of loyalty to a particular type of film. This implied repeat attendance therefore argues that the share of domestic box office captured by local products probably overstates the *number* of Australians who make up the total generic audience.

The division in the national market between the loyal, attentive, specialized and vocal audience for Australian films ('screen culture') and the

significant majority who remain outside this circle is a more confronting problem for the Australian film industry, its critics and its historians. The behaviour of 'the Australian market' has done far more than the generic audience to shape, by its very absence of support, the nature of the Australian film. Many historians have noticed the tension between cultural and economic goals that has been the hallmark of the industry's account of itself since the revival. Central to this is the spectre of an audience whose behaviour might be described as generic non-attendance. This is a difficult admission: that Australian films are not accidentally overlooked because of the appeal of particular competitor products at any one time, and that they are therefore not necessarily random casualties of Hollywood release patterns, but rather that there is a predictability to non-attendance which begins to look like genre avoidance. This avoiding audience is the one about which we have little historical understanding, and it is my suggestion that both Australian cinema analysis and the cinema studies curriculum would be less prone to offhand assumptions about its particular habit of bad faith if we knew more about its social history. If, as Jonathan Rayner suggests as an explanation for the poor performance of Australian cinema since the 1970s, the 'nationalistic agenda was countered by the pragmatism of the marketplace' (Rayner 2000: 7), then we could think a little more about the history of this pragmatic marketplace. Why have Australians been consistently enthusiastic cinema-goers, and often tolerant of poor-quality films or cinema-going experiences (including poor-quality Hollywood presentations), but have been seemingly unable to extend that tolerance to Australian films? What kind of pragmatism is at work here? As a research aim, this seems to promise at least comparable benefit to the continued detailed study of the films this marketplace has chosen to ignore.

An audience-centred approach to Australian film history: some obvious limitations

If we can begin to imagine the kind of research and teaching that might begin (rather than end) with something called 'the Australian cinema audience', the first challenge relates to the limited transferability of the research into *particular* Australian audiences. Textual analysis is very effective at detecting trends across movies produced at similar times, or on similar themes, or even by the same production teams. Research into distribution and exhibition can zoom out to reveal regional or national trends in box office, release patterns or market segmentation. Research focusing on audience behaviours and experiences tends – for obvious reasons – to convene around the local microstudy. Cinema-going is a cultural practice which occurs in specific places, at set times and which has the capacity to mobilize particular publics who for the duration of the event are paying for and consuming two interlinked place-based intangibles. First, the audience encounters the film as one among many versions of itself, screened on that occasion, in that location; and second, the audience is paying to be part of a larger social experience consisting substantially of non-filmic elements. To an extent, each film screening is a singular reconstitution of the text, shaped by the particular technical, architectural and social facilities of the screening environment. Research into the audience

experience, on the other hand, will quickly reveal the significance of print or sound quality, theatre size and construction, seating choice and angle on the screen, projection problems, audience interactions, temperature and so on. Added to this are all the potential amendments to the film itself in terms of cuts, dubbing, titling, remastering or restoration. Both the idea of event versioning and of the non-filmic realm of the cinema-going experience predispose research towards specific locations, but there are significant limitations to this approach if the agenda is framed by a single medium, and the aim is to scale up to the regional or national level. In other words, the politics of scale is an immediate problem that an audience-centred approach to a *national* cinema culture needs to address. We need to think carefully about the capacity of an audience-centred research strategy to produce either a broad overview comparable to the production-centred study of cinema; or a degree of generalization comparable to the scholarly aim of, say, spectator theory.

To address this challenge, we need to find ways to connect the history of the Australian picture theatre and its management, and the recalled experiences of the Australian cinema-goer, to the larger questions that shape the national research agenda – and also, as I will argue shortly, to enable Australian research to make a significant contribution to the international research agenda. This work has begun, and is aptly characterized by two studies of the Australian drive-in by Goldsmith (1999) and Bertrand (2006); analysis of the social heritage, as well as the architectural history, of Australian cinema-going driven by the work of Kevin Cork and Ross Thorne (Cork 1995; Thorne 1999, Thorne 2006a; Cork and Thorne 2006); and studies by oral historian Nancy Huggett (2002) and Anne Helen Wilson (2006) that have focused on the interrelationships between small-town theatre owners and their audiences in regional areas: the Illawarra in New South Wales and Gippsland in Victoria. A larger-scale study of Australian distribution patterns and audience experiences has been under way since 2005, one aim of which is to develop the protocols to collect and manage primary data in this field (Bowles et al. 2007). Methodologically, these scholars have taken a mixed approach, combing existing histories of the Australian industry for mentions of exhibition or audiences, as well as drawing on newspaper and trade journal sources and, in some cases, oral history interviews. Goldsmith focuses on newspaper and trade press sources; Cork and Thorne have conducted detailed statistical analysis of cinema distribution and box office; and Cork's 1995 study of cinema-going in the central west of New South Wales included a conventionally rigorous focus-group analysis of the themes emerging in interviews with 40 seniors from small and medium-sized rural towns. Cork's thematic analysis of his interview material isolates six themes: attendance, audience, motive, preparations, recollections and perceptions. Among his interviewees was a woman who said that 'she, her three brothers and two sisters "[…] would go into the pictures – we always walked *the three miles of rough dirt road*"' (Cork 1995: 11, emphasis mine).

These approaches are complemented by Bertrand's inventory of known screening venues in Western Australia, including via the use of a website designed to attract public contribution, which she acknowledges as a significant element to her research. In other words, an audience-centred

research programme is a broad collaborative enterprise which needs to find many different ways to capture the nature of ordinary experiences not commonly captured in the formal historical archive, but which reside in popular memory, as Bertrand demonstrates in her vivid composite illustration of the social history of the Australian drive-in:

> You first attended with your family: mother and father dressed neatly but casually – it was not a 'dress-up' occasion like a visit to the hard-top cinema – and the children bathed and dressed in nightclothes. You would arrive well before dark, with a picnic tea in a basket: the food would rapidly disappear as you ran back and forth between the spot the family had marked as its own (by a rug on the ground or a tablecloth on the picnic tables) and the children's playground, just below the screen. […] As darkness fell, the picnic would be packed up, the children taken to the toilet […] and then stowed in the back seat, while Mum and Dad settled into the front. The window would be wound down so that the speaker could be taken from its stand beside the driver's seat and hooked over the top of the window, which was then wound up as far as possible, to keep out draughts (though it never kept out mosquitoes). Then the entertainment would begin.
>
> (Bertrand 2006: 1)

The continuum of methodological options connecting the research I have described above involve both qualitative and quantitative data in the conventional scholarly sense, as well as an emerging agenda concerning public contribution and partnerships with volunteer collecting institutions such as local museums and oral history groups. But this diversity is the second reason why audience research can be difficult to scale up: data captured by different means at different locations, and for different purposes, can be difficult to collate, further limiting the prospect of profiling a 'national cinema audience'. To put this very simply: it is possible to write the history of the national production industry focusing on major cities on the eastern coast of Australia; but it is not possible to achieve the same national coverage simply by sampling audiences in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. While there are some comparisons between this lack of methodological fit and the different strategies used in textual analysis, there does seem to be a more significant difficulty in bridging the gap between different styles of audience analysis that requires a greater effort in collaboration among researchers to set an agenda for this approach. Can we achieve some consensus on what we are looking for, and why? And if the local microstudy does not readily lend itself to national generalization, what else does the study of a particular audience contribute to a broader sense of Australia's screen culture?

Cinema-going in very marginal places

I want to begin my answer to this question by reflecting on a local case study based in part on oral history interviews conducted in 2006. The Cobargo Picture Show was a small commercial enterprise housed in a modest weatherboard school of arts on the far south coast of New South Wales, operating from the late 1920s, intermittently serving a rural community of perhaps 400, in a venue designed primarily for other activities and used once a week to screen movies using a hole-in-the-wall projector

and hard bench seating. Nancy Huggett and I conducted interviews with Cobargo residents, who recall the local cinema experience along a continuum from uncomfortable to unmemorable. Their sympathetic descriptions of the style of the itinerant showman who included Cobargo in his territory in the post-war period acknowledge that he had entered a difficult business at a difficult time. This operator, Allan Jamieson, was evidently far from the mythic figure of the high-profile impresario associated with purpose-built theatres in the district, as our interviewees explained:

> BS: I'd describe him as a very quiet sort of a person, rather casual. I don't know, he didn't rush around a lot and he wasn't a loud person. He was just a very quiet sort of a person. He didn't worry a lot as long as he was making money to buy some food. He wasn't an energetic sort of a person at all – he was just a quiet sort of a person.
>
> NS: He wasn't all that energetic because if the film broke out at Candelo, which it often did in those days, we'd all have to sit very patiently while Allan spliced, and cut, and joined, and then 'Oh, we're back again!' He was a very casual chap.
>
> (Schaefer and Sutherland 2006)

Far from being a quasi-celebrity bringing glamorous, escapist entertainment to town, Allan Jamieson was a local identity defined, like many rural projectionists and operators, as much by his everyday struggles, his other work as a rabbit-trapper, and some family difficulties, as he was by association with Hollywood or even with the Sydney-based distribution industry. Allan Jamieson was one of the last itinerant film exhibitors in New South Wales; the remoteness and poor transport infrastructure around the region enabled him to sustain into the 1960s a complex circuit linking a number of very small communities.[1] He took his projector and films by truck around the halls and schools of arts in the area, sometimes staying with members of his family in different villages, and casually hiring locals where necessary to provide extra support in the ticket booth. He was a familiar figure, not a famous one, and one interviewee remembered that unlike other prominent town personalities at the time, Allan Jamieson 'wasn't on the Show Society […] wasn't involved with the P & C. Not as much a community figure' (Sawtell 2006). By contrast to these key institutions of rural life, cinema was not centrally important to the rural communities in this region, although they lent it just enough support for it to keep going. From time to time efforts were made to promote it as a local business deserving of more sustained patronage, but its operation remained fitful (Bowles 2007).

> BS: It's like everything else, there seems to come a time when people get a bit tired of going to certain things and so they don't go so the pictures would knock off for a while and there would be no pictures and then they'd get going again. It's like everything in the country, they're up and down, you get good times and bad times. It depends what creates a problem, often drought or something and people can't afford to do it. They are too busy trying to feed their animals and grow things.
>
> (Schaefer and Sutherland 2006)

1. The first demonstration of a television set in the region occurred in 1957, but television reception was poor and in many parts of the region unwatchable until the late 1960s. See Hanson (2007).

On the face of things, therefore, a village such as Cobargo is an unlikely locality for significant cinema research into the Australian audience; and Allan Jamieson is an unusual candidate for the attention Australian history likes to reserve for its cinema heroes.

Nevertheless, the undemonstrative Mr Jamieson and his small, distracted audience were part of the overall *diversity* of the Australian cinema market, and for the Cobargo cinema-goer at least the features and social impact of Mr Jamieson's operation were normal rather than atypical. This intersection of diversity at the national level with typicality at the local level is the hallmark of the difficulties I have been describing. What is the use of a single case study like this to a history of cinema-going in Australia without the benefit of robust comparative data? The most obvious approach is to expand the number and diversity of historical microstudies while relinquishing some of the time-intensive aspects of the local research, including oral histories; or to establish criteria for significance that ensure that the small number of case studies which can be completed in detail are as typical – and thus as adaptable – as possible given the framework of Australia's already marginal historical status in terms of global cinema. In effect, however, this latter suggestion is likely to mean that we concede the strategic benefit of treating the Australian metropolitan and suburban theatre as 'most typical' of our cinema history – with obvious implications for the particular histories of small places.

But as Gregory Waller has suggested in his examination of the career of Jamieson's historical peer, the Kentucky travelling exhibitor Robert Southard, historical glimpses of marginal figures

> open[s] up historiographical possibilities [...] Following the road travelled by Robert Southard complicates and enriches our sense of the history of American film in the 1930s and 1940s, a history that needs to take more into account the cultural power and presence of the movies beyond the screen, and outside of the theatre.
>
> (Waller 2004)

Like Robert Southard, Allen Jamieson fits within that wider history of Australian film that has something to gain by being open not only to the stories of marginal figures in the industry, but also to the ways in which cinema intersected with the cultural history 'beyond the screen'. As our interviewees in Cobargo revealed to us, the story of cinema-going is part of larger cultural and economic formations (drought, hard times and the need to grow things). This captures that aspect of the social meaning of cinema-going which cinema studies has more typically ignored: the story of a night's entertainment that begins with a decision made earlier in the week or the day, perhaps while reading the paper or noticing a flyer. This is the story that includes family treats and arguments, the small strategies and setbacks of courtship, travel plans, weather and all the anticipatory small talk on the way there, the social networking in the hall, and the reviews and re-enactments on the way home. In imagining the Australian cinema-goer as engaged in socially and economically complex decision-making behaviour within specific community settings, this approach expands the potential audience for cinema research to include

social and economic historians, geographers, and, eventually, policy-makers.

It may even bring us a little nearer to accounting for the reasons why the Australian audience has seemed not to recognize itself in the imagined community interpellated by Australian cultural policy rhetoric.

Presenting Australian audience-centred research in an international context

These questions concerning the nature, scope and methodological framework for an audience-centred research strategy for Australian cinema history link directly to the challenge of publishing Australian case study research outcomes. The growth of location-specific studies in cinema-going in Europe and the United States has opened up the prospect of international comparisons and data sharing, and Australian research has been well represented in this development.[2] Nevertheless, it is hard to argue even in these sympathetic contexts for the international typicality of the Australian regional study or, on the other hand, for its captivating singularity. The publication of research into multiple local histories of Australian cinema-going might be poignant and even helpful to local communities and their collecting institutions, but this is precisely because the rigour of these studies emerges from their strict location within particularities of place and culture. Australian cinema audience research risks remaining in a position ironically quite familiar to historians of the production industry: in the category of quirky but minor instances of a global cultural practice dominated by the American experience.

But if we are to imagine the Australian case study as being capable of having genuine international impact, then first we need to allow our research agenda to be shaped – at least in part – by the questions others are asking in other places. This might seem a derivative and limited strategy, but it does expand the purpose of otherwise marginal research. In continuing to test the limits of the commonsense assumptions arising from research in Europe and North America, Australian studies needs to support a global agenda which reflects diversity and contradiction within and across global markets, rather than one that continues to imagine cinema as a culturally homogenizing global force. North American researchers, for example, have begun the work of describing and reflecting upon the cultural impact of the racially segregated picture theatre (Waller 1995; Jones 2003; Allen 2006). To this scholarship, Australian research presents a complementary witness, demonstrating that the social performativity of segregation in Australia was different in matters of means and purpose, and at the level of architectural assumption about high-status and low-status seating areas. The segregated Australian picture theatre was not simply a derivation of an American cultural instrument, but developed out of pre-existing local cultural practices, enabling Australian communities to transfer the means of social mixing from one venue to another. Architecturally, it reversed the practice in American theatres of confining non-white patrons to a balcony area, and instead commonly directed Aboriginal cinema-goers to the front rows of the theatre. Moreover, the regional variation in techniques used to achieve segregation in Australian theatres (partitions, ropes or customary practice), as well as the ways in

2. The International Cinema Audiences Research Group (ICARG), for example, brings together scholars from a number of countries working in this field, and includes links to major funded projects in the United States, the European Union and Australia; for more information see http://www.home-rproject.org/?display=icarg

which the practice of segregation can be recalled, regretted, reinterpreted, forgotten and denied by members of the same audience, not only extend our knowledge of Australian cinema-going but also have the capacity to sharpen the focus within US research on what can now be seen to be highly distinctive about the social experience of the American segregated theatre.

Second, projecting Australian audience research into the international arena enables us to engage in the international discussion both of the methodological problems involved in audience research and the significant theoretical objections to the recovery of a historical social experience, and its use. It is important to remember that for North American scholars in particular, these objections are framed by the concept of a public sphere whose scale and operation is very different to our own. The argument that the cinema is a primary site of public pedagogy, and that *this* justifies continued focus on the structure and poetics of film content, carries different weight in the market where the dominant anglophone production industry negotiates with its own mass domestic audience. Nevertheless, these assertions have been far-reaching in their effects and have led to some awkward contortions in the Australian context, in terms of the invocation of a filmic contribution to a public sphere whose primary interest is the parochial question of national identity. In her well-known essay on the similarities between early and post-classical cinema-going Miriam Hansen, whose work on the public sphere has been influential in the Australian context (Goldsmith 1999; Collins and Davis 2006) challenges the emergence of research into the historical audience and argues that it has become associated with the nostalgic rebranding of cinema 'as a good object' and as a site of active and empowered consumption. Engaging with Breakwell and Hammond's hypothetical 'woman in the third row', whose personal interpretive horizon they argue can never be assumed from analysis of the content of the film she is watching, Hansen counters that '[…] to reduce these dimensions, in a subjectivist vein, to the merely personal and idiosyncratic will mean missing out on the more systematic parameters of subjectivity that structure, enable, and refract our personal engagement with the film' (Hansen 1994: 146). She concedes that the cinema audience operates within 'a margin of improvisation, interpretation and unpredictability' but asserts that cinema-going is an experience ultimately governed by structure and social predictability; for Hansen, the public sphere is both intimate and impersonal. For this reason, she suggests, we would of course expect to see variation between local audiences in terms of their engagement with film content, but these are far less significant than the systematic cultural framing of their engagement.

It is important to understand the implications of this rebuttal of the 'merely personal and idiosyncratic'. As Robert Allen has recently argued, this ambivalence concerning the idiosyncratic is allied to a broad concern that scholars using oral history interviews and personal correspondence to build a picture of the audience experience have at best lapsed into a naïve pre-theoretical state, or at worst are brandishing empirical research as a direct challenge to what Allen calls the 'epistemological invulnerability' of spectator theory (Allen 2006: 60; see also Corbett 1998/99). It is not my intention to probe further the professional debate concerning the legacy of

spectator theory which has preoccupied North American and British scholars, but rather to suggest that this moment represents an opportunity for Australian researchers to present a particularly practical argument concerning the incapacity of generalized theories of the spectator experience to address the questions that are important in this context. As I suggested earlier, in Australia we are faced with a tradition of policy rhetoric that resembles spectator theory in many ways, and which is equally resistant to introspection, to use Allen's term. The predicament for Australian researchers is that we now need to explain what forms of national benefit derive from understanding more about the social experience of an audience that has consistently failed to see the point of a national film-producing industry – and to do this without succumbing to the argument that this historical knowledge is justified because it will improve the commercial prospects of the Australian movie.

Starting with the audience also offers a different approach to considering the effectiveness of Australia's cultural funding policies. Rather than asking how well or indifferently the movies produced and protected by these policies represent Australia, we can adjust the question to ask whether the policies themselves represent effectively the interests and diversity of the Australian audience, who may quite legitimately prefer to watch movies from other places, for as long as they continue to watch movies at all. Our responsibility to the national production sector is not audience development, but to develop research questions and methods that will improve our understanding of the broad and variegated nature of the Australian market. This, after all, is the market that apparently rejects the core proposition that Australian movies are central to the maintenance of Australian cultural identity. To do this, we need to conceive of the Australian cinema-goer as a citizen engaged in a complex set of cultural behaviours that incorporate both systematic and idiosyncratic components – as Vivian Sobchack puts it well, 'the cultural and historical situations in which materiality and meaning come to cohere in the praxis of everyday life' (Sobchack 1994). A research agenda that is open-minded about the minority status of the Australian movie within this praxis will help us provide a clearer account of the ways in which small film markets like Australia's contribute to the overall diversity of the global film experience, just as small places within this market, like Cobargo, are part of the complicated cultural history of cinema in Australia.

Acknowledgement

Warm thanks are due to the residents of Cobargo, NSW, for their generous recollections of the picture shows run by Mr Allan Jamieson. Particular thanks to those interviewees cited in this article: Mr Ray Sawtell, Mrs Nola Sutherland and Mrs Beryl Schaefer OAM, FM.

References

AFC (2007), '2006 Box Office Backgrounder', http://www.afc.gov.au/downloads/2006_bo_backgrounder_final.pdf
Accessed 15 April 2007.

—— (2007a), 'About Us', http://www.afc.gov.au/profile/about_us/default.aspx
Accessed 15 April 2007.

Allen, R.C. (2006), 'Relocating American Film History: The "Problem" of the Empirical', *Cultural Studies*, 20: 1, pp. 48–88.

Bertrand, I. (2006), '"Bring[ing] Family Life into the Theatres": The Drive-ins of Western Australia', *Screening the Past*, http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/19/drive-ins-WA.html
Accessed 20 March 2007.

Bishop, Hon J. MP (2006), Address to the History Teachers' Association of Australia conference, Fremantle, 6 October, http://www.dest.gov.au/Ministers/Media/Bishop/2006/10/B001061006.asp
Accessed 15 April 2007.

Bowles, K. (2007), '"All the Evidence is that Cobargo is Slipping": Towards a Cultural Ecology of the Rural Picture Show', *Film Studies*, Manchester University Press, 10, pp. 87–96.

Bowles, K., Maltby, R., Verhoeven D. and Walsh M. (2007), 'More Than Ballyhoo? The Importance of Understanding Film Consumption in Australia', *Metro*, 152, pp. 96–101.

Collins, F. and Davis, T. (2004), *Australian Cinema after Mabo*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Corbett, K. (1998/99), 'Empty Seats: The Missing History of Movie-Watching', *Journal of Film and Video*, 50: 4, pp. 34–49.

Cork, K. (1995), 'Cinema as "Place": The Case of the Picture Theatres in a Group of Towns and Villages in the Central West of New South Wales', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 49, pp. 8–18.

Cork, K. and Thorne, R. (2006), 'The Social Significance of the Picture Theatre: How Many People *Did Attend* Picture Theatres in New South Wales Before Television and Video?', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 58–60, pp. 48–67.

Currency Press (2002), '*Australian Screen Classics* Promotion Leaflet', http://www.currency.com.au/resources/1/AustScreenClassics_leaflet.pdf
Accessed 10 April 2007.

Goldsmith, B. (1999), '"The Comfort Lies in all the Things you can do": The Australian Drive-in – Cinema of Distraction', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 33: 1, pp. 153–64.

Hanson, S. (2007), 'Snow Falling on Bega: Early Television Reception on the Far South Coast of New South Wales', University of Wollongong, http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/2006-2007ss/index.html
Accessed 10 July 2007.

Hansen, M. (1994), 'Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere', in L. Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp. 134–52.

Huggett, N. (2002), 'A Cultural History of Cinema-Going in the Illawarra 1900–1950', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wollongong.

Higson, A. (1989), 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen*, 30: 4, pp. 36–46.

Jones, J. (2003), *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall and Resurrection*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Maltby, R. (2006), 'Cinema in Context: On the Prospect of Writing Cinema History from Below', in I. Blom and W. Strauven (eds), *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis,* 9: 2, pp. 74–96.

Miller, T. (1999), 'Screening the Nation: Rethinking Options', *Cinema Journal*, 38: 4, pp. 93–97.

Moran, A. (1996), *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives*, London and New York: Routledge.

National Film and Sound Archive (2007), 'About Us', http://www.nfsa.afc.gov.au/Screensound/Screenso.nsf/HeadingPagesDisplay/About+UsWho+We+Are?OpenDocument
Accessed 10 April 2007.

Rayner, J. (2000), *Contemporary Australian Cinema: An Introduction*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Routt, W.D. (1994), 'Are You a Fish? Are You a Snake? An Obvious Lecture and Some Notes on *The Last Wave*', *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, 8: 2, http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/8.2/Routt.html
Accessed 20 March 2007.

Sobchack, V. (1994), 'The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic "Presence"', in H.U. Bumbrecht and K.L. Pfeiffer (eds), *Materialities of Communication*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 83–106, http://studio.berkeley.edu/niemeyer/stories/seminal-essays.htm#sobchack
Accessed 15 April 2007.

Thorne, R. (1999), 'The Problem of Assessing the Cultural Heritage of Buildings through Individual Criteria: The Case of the Social Significance of the Traditional Picture Theatre', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 53–54, pp. 58–102.

—— (2006), 'A Study of the Type of Historical Research Needed to Establish Heritage Significance: The Case of Early Theatre and Cinema in Junee, New South Wales', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 58–60, pp. 5–23.

—— (2006a), 'The Social and Aural Environment as Part of the "Presentation" used to Attract Audiences to Pictures Theatres, circa 1910 to 1955', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 58–60, pp. 68–86.

Waller, G.A. (1995), *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896–1930*, Washington, DC and London: Smithsonian Institute Press.

—— (2003/04), 'Robert Southard and the History of Traveling Film Exhibition', *Film Quarterly*, 57: 2, pp. 2–14.

Wilson, Anne H (2006), 'Modernity and the Film Exhibition Industry in Gippsland: the Glover family business 1926–1973', *Senses of Cinema*, 41, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/06/41/modernity-gippsland-glover.html
Accessed 20 March 2007.

Oral history interviews cited

Sawtell, R. (2006), interview by K. Bowles and N. Huggett (full transcript, University of Wollongong), November.

Schaefer, B. and Sutherland, N. (2006), interview by K. Bowles and N. Huggett (full transcript, University of Wollongong), November.

Suggested citation

Bowles, K. (2007), 'Three miles of rough dirt road': towards an audience-centred approach to cinema studies in Australia', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 245–260, doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.245/1

Contributor details

Kate Bowles is a senior lecturer at the University of Wollongong, researching regional and rural oral histories of Australian cinema-going. Contact: School of Social Science, Media and Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, Northfields Avenue, Wollongong, NSW 2522.
E-mail: kbowles@uow.edu.au

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.261/1

Everyone was watching! Strategies of self-presentation in oral histories of cinema-going

Nancy Huggett *University of Wollongong*

Abstract

This article considers the different ways in which strategies of selective self-presentation on behalf of both interviewee and interviewer structure the oral history narrative, using, as an example, the ways in which embarrassment and shame function in narratives of cinema-going in Australia. The essay explores when and how embarrassment and shame feature in cinema-going narratives and also the way in which some issues, such as the recollection of segregation in rural cinemas, disrupt the easy conversational flow of a narrative and cause discomfort, bordering on embarrassment and shame for both interviewee and interviewer.

Drawing on oral histories and autobiographical accounts from New South Wales cinema-goers, this article delves into the public/private and past/present functions of embarrassment and shame in order to better understand cinema-going practices and recollection strategies. It takes into account how critical oral history and cultural theory can assist cinema studies to examine how practices of cinema-going are situated within wider cultural attitudes and discourses.

Keywords

cinema
audiences
reception
oral history
segregation

Finding out about cinema-going over a cup of tea and a plate of home-made scones is more challenging than it may at first appear. Conducting oral history interviews with cinema-goers in their own homes allows the person being interviewed to feel more relaxed and to assume a degree of control over the situation in their role as host and provider of hospitality (as well as information) which, in a small way, may counter the unequal power relationship often perceived to exist between academic researcher and source. However, the complex social negotiation that takes place during an oral history interview relies on numerous judgements on the part of both the interviewer and interviewee as to what can and should be said and how, which is governed by accepted codes of behaviour.

Over the past twelve years of interviewing people about their memories of cinema, I have become increasingly interested in the way embarrassment and shame both feature in and also shape some cinema-going narratives, to a degree that might seem surprising. I will try to untangle some of the differences between embarrassment and shame later in this article but I want to highlight one early distinction between the two. In my experience, embarrassing stories are disclosed intentionally, as part of a deliberate narrative strategy that draws interviewer and interviewee together over a shared sense of empathy and humour. Narratives that feature shameful

incidents or engender shame in the interviewee and/or interviewer are much less likely to occur but when they do, they disrupt the easy conversational flow of narratives and cause discomfort and discomposure.

Oral history is a critically reflective research methodology that is experienced in dealing with potentially shameful and/or traumatic issues (Passerini 1987; Portelli 1991; Thomson 1994; Yow 2006; Roseman 2006). However, in cinema studies, where oral histories with audience members are still a relatively new way of approaching cinema reception, it is rare that such problematic issues arise as most conversations about cinema-going involve positive reflections that are often nostalgic and relatively non-challenging. An exception is when oral history is used to uncover histories of racial segregation in rural Australian cinemas and it is here where shame threatens to emerge. By reflecting on specific stories of racial segregation and cinema-going and also by considering how other race-related anecdotes contextualize the cinema-going stories and examining how my own attitudes to race affect how an interview proceeds and is later interpreted, I hope to explore how a critically reflective oral history methodology can help situate the history of cinema-going within the larger context of individual and community attitudes, past and present. This allows us to move beyond the reconstruction of what happened at the pictures to a consideration of how cinema-going is given meaning and is integrated into everyday life.

Negotiating embarrassment and shame

Embarrassment and shame share common features. Elspeth Probyn has highlighted their corporeality, analysing the blush that accompanies shame. Following Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Probyn explores how our bodies tell us clearly when we are not at one with our social environment and have crossed expected norms (Probyn 2005: 48–49). This leads us to Irving Goffman's seminal essay on 'Embarrassment and Social Organisation' where he contends that the social codes that govern our interaction come into force through the possibility or threat of embarrassment (Goffman 1956: 264–71). The idea that embarrassment and shame patrol the borders of what is acceptable in any given situation and society is a key one here. Embarrassment and shame are indicators that an individual is aware that the norms governing a given situation have been transgressed. Thomas J. Scheff has written that, 'embarrassment is a less intense, brief and overtly experienced form of shame' (Scheff 1990: 18). Further, Michael Billig recounts research by Miller and Tangney who asked students to recall incidents that caused them embarrassment and incidents that caused them shame. This research found that it was humour that distinguished embarrassing incidents from shameful ones: embarrassing incidents being those that the students found funny or that had made other people laugh at the time. Billig points out that, 'what is shameful isn't necessarily funny but what is embarrassing is potentially humorous' (Billig 2001: 29).

Following this contention, I want to present a couple of examples of embarrassing stories of cinema-going recounted by women I have interviewed. First are Mary Bain and her daughter Pam recalling two incidents that occurred when they went to the pictures in Dapto and Wollongong

respectively. Second is Minnie Nichols talking about a visit to the Woonona Princess Theatre to the north of Wollongong:

Interview 1

PB: […] I suppose I would have been about twelve, thirteen before I was allowed to go to the movies. At that stage it was only to Dapto. [To Mary, her mother] Sometimes you used to go too, on the bus. I can remember one night we all went to the movies in Dapto and mum had on this delphinium blue crepe dress-suit. Was it that one or the lemony one? Anyway it was one of those two that she had and it poured raining.

MB: It shrunk!

PB: We had to run across where the old hotel was in the puddles. It was pouring rain and mum's frock with the old crepe material went like this [makes a shrinking motion]! It shrunk up on her!

NH: So going to the pictures would be an event you dressed up for?

PB: Oh yes.

MB: You dressed up.

PB: You always dressed up for Saturday nights.

MB: Different to today!

PB: High-heeled shoes and the whole works – you had to dress up. I remember one Saturday night. We used to get off the bus outside of *Badrans* in Wollongong and I stepped off the bus and tripped on the step – all done up to the nines with my flower on (you used to wear artificial flowers at the time on your shoulder), flower on my shoulder and everything and I tripped out of the bus and fell flat on my face in Crown Street all dressed up to the nines. Everyone was standing around and getting off buses! And I broke the heel off my shoe! So for the rest of the night I had no heel on my shoe! (Bain and Bain 1999: 6)

Interview 2

MN: My mother used to go at night-time with an old friend that lived further up the street. I'll never forget one night she went and she got so excited she was hitting her friend on the knee. And the lights came up and there was a man sitting there!

NH: Oh no, she'd got the wrong side! (Nicholls 1995: 1)

These are just two examples of stories of embarrassment associated with cinema-going experiences. Minnie's anecdote represents one of the hazards of cinema-going in the dark. This is a common feature of such narratives: embarrassing incidents (and also those of larrikin behaviour by cinema-goers) that culminate with the lights being switched on or an usherette shining a torch to reveal the embarrassing incident or the guilty mischief-makers. Mary's and Pam's embarrassing dress incidents highlight a time when going to the pictures entailed dressing up in one's best clothes, and again this is a common cinema-going trope, with mainly female cinema-goers, recalling what was worn at different times and to different theatres and often contrasting past dress codes with current casual preferences. Another example of an embarrassing incident featuring clothing came from an usherette I interviewed who confessed, giggling all the while, to forgetting to put on her knickers when getting into her usherette uniform one day and having to borrow a pair from a friend whose family had a clothing shop next to the theatre.

What is interesting about these embarrassing cinema-going stories is that they are usually told by women. Linguist Jennifer Coates has written

on the differences between styles of language adopted by men and women:

> It is now widely accepted that men and women talk differently, that is, that women and men make differential use of the linguistic resources available to them […] There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that male speakers are socialised into a competitive style of discourse, while women are socialised into a more cooperative style of speech.
>
> (Coates 1995: 13)

Certainly, many of the women I have interviewed about cinema-going exhibit such a cooperative style of speech (and I do not doubt that, being a woman interviewer would tend to draw out such cooperative narrative strategies from other women). In these interviews, self-disclosure is more common than in interviews conducted with men and humour tends to be self-directed with women telling embarrassing tales against themselves while men tell humorous stories about others. Such narrative strategies serve to bring interviewer and interviewee closer together, allowing a greater sense of trust and intimacy to emerge.

Another feature that these anecdotes and other embarrassing tales share is that the embarrassing incidents take place in a public space in front of an audience (literally the cinema audience in Minnie's case and the passengers getting off the bus and people in the street for Mary and Pam). Billig has suggested that, 'there is evidence that embarrassment is greater in front of strangers than friends [… and] this suggests that the looser the social bond, the greater the potential for embarrassment at least in certain circumstances' (Billig 2001: 29). The cinema is an interesting location for tales of embarrassment as the type of venue often predicts the closeness or looseness of audience members' relationships with one another: the larger suburban and metropolitan cinemas being more likely to contain audience members unknown to one another whereas the smaller local venues increasing the likelihood that the audience members are known to one another. Indeed, the incidents recalled feature unknown crowds or larger cinema audiences. If the audience is known to you and you accidentally transgress the rules and embarrass yourself is this more likely to be shameful rather than embarrassing?

Certainly, the shame that Isabel Flick, an Aboriginal cinema-goer, recounts at making a stand against segregation at her local cinema is borne of the fact that the other members of the Collarenebri audience are known to her and that the cinema manager is also the store owner who she has to face the next day. Born in the late 1920s, Isabel Flick's journey from childhood in Collarenebri, northern New South Wales, through to her work as an Aboriginal rights activist, community worker and educator is depicted in Isabel's and Heather Goodall's book, *Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman*. In the book, Isabel reflects on the first time she stood up to injustice when she opposed racial segregation at Collarenebri's 'Liberty Picture Show' in 1961. The incident is recounted by Isabel as follows:

> And I said to this old fella in the ticket box: 'I want you to come and fix this. Take these ropes off! What do you think we are? Our money is as good as anyone

> else's and we want to sit where we want to sit.' I kept standing there in front of the ticket office, and by then my sister-in-law was there too. The two of us, making trouble! And my poor little heart, I don't know how it stayed in my chest, but it did. Even though I said it as calmly as I could, I was so sick within myself. I heard my own mob saying: 'Oh God, she's making us shame!' But they were afraid of the confrontation too. And then someone said: 'Good on you Isabel, it's about time that happened.' And then old Mark Cutler could see I was just going to stand there and keep standing there. Sometimes I think if he'd waited just a little longer I'd have gone away. But then he said, 'Oh, all right, you can sit anywhere then!' And that's what happened.
>
> (Flick and Goodall 2004: 90–91)

Isabel's reference to 'my own mob saying "Oh God, she's making us shame"' indicates that her primary fear is of shaming herself and her fellow Aboriginal community members, which demonstrates the connection between shame and intimacy. Isabel's actions present significant risks both in terms of what her own community will think of her and because the cinema manager, Mr Cutler, is also the store owner who she has to continue to do business with when she comes to town to do her shopping. This risk is highlighted when Isabel suggests that if Mr Cutler had waited 'just a little longer' then she would have 'gone away'. Had she backed down before Mr Cutler relented, the shame would have been intensified and the incident would not have had the same profound effect on Isabel or the Collarenebri community.

The fact that Isabel's stand was rewarded with an end to segregation at the cinema; that attitudes in Australia with regard to segregation have changed; and that some members of the Collarenebri community at the time and afterwards commended her actions allows the tale to be retold and rescues it from a potentially shameful narrative to that of a victory narrative. However, even in the retelling, the reader gets a clear sense of how hard making a stand was as Isabel highlights the corporeality of the experience pitying her 'poor little heart' and stating she was 'so sick' within herself. This echoes Probyn's linking of shame and embarrassment to physical manifestations and Goffman's assertion that the social codes that bind us do so through the possibility or threat of embarrassment or shame and that infringing these codes on purpose is a very risky strategy.

It is interesting to observe that when Isabel's story is recounted by her niece, Barbara, it is done in a very different way:

> In the 1960s these two women took on the establishment and desegregated the picture theatre at Collarenebri […] they stood at the small ticket window and demanded the theatre be desegregated. Troublemaking Blacks? Wasn't that what he called them? Well they told him they would block his patrons and prevent them from purchasing their tickets until the ropes were taken down. There they stood, defiant. Two black women in that crowd of whites. Talking calmly. Can't you see how proud they were. Their heads held so high.
>
> (Flick and Goodall 2004: 92–93)

For Barbara, the tale is one of triumph against oppression. Whereas Isabel highlights her fear and trepidation, Barbara tells the tale of defiance and

pride. Her aunt and her mother had 'their heads held high', talked calmly and yet 'demanded'. She also states that the two black women were in 'a crowd of whites' whereas Isabel highlights the shame she felt because she was in the presence of her fellow black community members whom she believed would be feeling ashamed that she was making a fuss. The threat of transgression of the social order in this particular arena is no longer a reality for Barbara so she speaks with the benefit of knowing her aunt's stand was rewarded and from a later period in time where segregation is rightly and loudly opposed.

These days, talk of segregated cinemas brings discomfort to white cinema-goers of the time. Interviews I have conducted recently, accompanied by another female interviewer, into cinema-going in the far south of New South Wales have uncovered the fact that the main local picture theatre, the Kings Theatre in Bega, was informally segregated, with Aboriginal cinema-goers sitting at the front of the theatre and white cinema-goers selecting the upstairs seats (if they could afford it) or the seats at the back of the downstairs area as their preference. The few rows at the front of the cinema where Aboriginal cinema-goers were expected to sit were not formally demarcated with a rope, as was the practice in other rural cinemas such as Collarenebri; nevertheless, the seating expectations were clearly understood by the local community.

It is interesting to examine how stories of segregation are recalled by white audience members. When the subject has been raised (usually by us rather than by those being interviewed) the narrative flow often falters as interviewees try to find a comfortable way of talking about segregation. This is a potentially shameful moment for white interviewees who are now living with the more recent discourse that segregation is unacceptable.

Some people we have interviewed either do not remember or claim to have not seen Aboriginal people at the Bega theatre:

> **KB:** Do you remember, at that time, Aboriginal people in the audience at the Kings?
> **NS:** No, I can't say that I do.
> **KB:** Do you think that means that they weren't there or that they don't stand out in your mind?
> **NS:** No, I can't bring to mind whether there were any there or not. I doubt that there were.
> **BS:** I don't think that there were. The Aboriginal Station was down at Wallaga Lake and that was a long way to come.
> **NS:** But they had Aborigines stationed at Tarraganda near Bega.
> **BS:** If they were anywhere they would be at Bega because it was too far to come here [the town of Cobargo].
> **NS:** There was a station at Tarraganda but I don't remember seeing any Aboriginal people [at the Bega Kings]. (Schaefer and Sutherland 2006: 10–11)

It is not surprising that some rural cinema-goers did not 'see' Aboriginal audience members given the formal and informal segregation in some venues and the way in which the public life of many towns, like Bega, excluded Aboriginal people in a myriad of ways, for example, not employing

Aboriginal people in the local shops and actively discouraging Aboriginal housing within the town until the 1960s. It is easy to understand, in this respect, how Aboriginal people were not visible in civic life. Other Bega residents we interviewed recalled Aboriginal community members at the cinema but accounted for the informal segregation in particular ways:

BR1: The Aboriginals, they always wanted to sit down the front downstairs and they used to get a bit you know…
NH: Vocal?
BR1: Yes …
SF: Were they directed to that area?
BR1: Not really, but they wanted to sit down there all by themselves. Towards the finish they wanted to come upstairs, and I think there were a few up there.
NH: So there was no formal policy saying that you had to sit down here, it would just depend on where people wanted to sit?
BR1: That's right. (Bega Resident 1 2006: 5)

And in another interview:

BR2: I told you the story of our children didn't I? Well, our eldest girl is rather imaginative and she always wanted to sit down the front of the theatre but the first rows were given to the Aboriginals. You never sat down there. Well she was always envious of these children, these people that could sit in these first three or so rows of seats. On one occasion there was nowhere else to go because there weren't other seats in the theatre and she never wanted to sit there again!
NH: Because you had to crane your neck up?
BR2: Yes.
KB: And the first rows, were they roped off or did you just know?
BR2: No, you just knew that that was the area the Aboriginals sat in. I don't think there was any class distinction as such.
NH: No, just an informal…
BR2: They went there. They sat there. You didn't – I don't think they ever attempted to sit other than in those seats.
KB: So you just sort of knew that that's how that worked?
BR2: Yes. (Bega Resident 2 2006: 7–8)

The examples here and others like it go as far as accepting that informal segregation occurred but do not allude to any outright racist behaviour by the cinema staff or cinema-going population, instead suggesting that Aboriginal cinema-goers *chose* to sit at the front of the theatre. One interviewee suggested that Aboriginal cinema-goers sat down the front where the view of the screen was more awkward because they got in for free which, while not being correct as far as we can establish, provided a credible explanation for the behaviour. Only one white interviewee has so far suggested that Aboriginal cinema-goers were *directed* to the seats by the usherettes, most preferring to assert that 'it was just how it happened'.

Oral historian Alistair Thomson's concept of 'composure' is a useful one with which to consider how people retell stories from their past in the present. He notes:

> In one sense we compose or construct memories using the public languages and meanings of our culture. In another sense we compose memories to help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives and identities, that gives us a feeling of composure. In practice these two processes are inseparable […].
>
> (Thomson 1994: 8)

The two senses of composure relate to public and private goals. First, we compose memories using available public discourses and structures. In other words, we select stories and present them in recognizable narrative forms and structures. As segregation is no longer an accepted practice, the ways of narrating such experiences are limited and explanations are offered that are publicly acceptable (the seats were cheaper, it was a matter of choice), that save face for the interviewee and maintain personal composure. The idea of composure helps to explain why cinema segregation is rarely raised in conversation by white audience members and why, when asked about the practice, narrators try and find acceptable explanations rather than admit to a practice of racial discrimination in which they were complicit. However, the pauses and hesitations in the narratives that occur when this issue is raised show how difficult it is to 'compose' adequate responses to the issue of segregation. Indeed, it is at these instances when 'discomposure' and shame threaten to intervene.

Penny Summerfield writes about 'discomposure' stating:

> The social recognition offered by the audience exercises a determining influence on the way a narrative may be told […] A particular terrain of memory or line of enquiry […] may produce discomposure, that is, personal disequilibrium, manifest in confusion, anger, self-contradiction, discomfort and difficulties sustaining a narrative.
>
> (Summerfield 2004: 69–70)

Introducing the difficult subject of segregation into narratives of cinema-going that are predominantly about fond memories and recollections causes discomposure and a halting and often unconvincing explanation that aims to answer the question whilst not implicating the self in a practice that is now understood by the majority to have been unjust.

But such discomposure in a narrative does not just cause shame and discomfort for the interviewees. It can also discompose the researcher. The interview relationship is a precarious one that relies on goodwill, a sense of shared understanding and adherence to accepted standards of politeness and hospitality. When a conversation trespasses into difficult subject areas such as segregation and race, neither party can remain certain that they still share a common view about the matter, particularly when there are differences between the parties such as age, location and experience that may suggest a possible lack of a commonly held view.

One interview recently made me realize how precarious the interview relationship is and how quickly and subtly an interview that has been proceeding well can become awkward, resulting in discomfort on my part. May is in her seventies and has led a hard life raising her family on the rural far south coast of New South Wales. She told us proudly of the good relationships she has held with local Aboriginal residents and of how there

was no segregation in her small-town picture show with families both black and white, rich and poor, sitting in the hall together. Taking this cinema-going comment in isolation, it would be reasonable to conclude that racial tensions were not apparent in the picture show of this small town. However, I want to consider other non-cinema-going anecdotes related by May which complicate this initial picture of racial harmony to illustrate the importance of situating cinema-going within other small-town relationships at the time and within the context of the interviewer–interviewee relationship.

To evidence the town's racial harmony, May and other white residents who we interviewed spoke of a local Aboriginal family who were well respected by and integrated within the community.[1] Aside from cinema-going, Aboriginal people were also referred to in relation to common discourses used by whites to commend black people: noting their sporting skills at boxing and running and musical talents as evidenced by the local Gum Leaf Band that used to tour the district. For many residents, the example of the integrated Aboriginal family together with a couple of positive comments in relation to sporting and artistic skills was all that was provided to evidence race relations in the town.

However, May and her family had a closer relationship to the local Aboriginal community. Compared with other residents we spoke with, May's family were relatively poor and relied on seasonal farm-work opportunities that they undertook alongside local Aboriginal people. May recalled how, during breaks from bean-picking, she would go shopping in town for herself and the Aboriginal women working with her while they minded the kids. So there was a sense of shared experience not common to all the people of the town. Also unlike her fellow residents, May was unusual in that she recounted other stories about race relations, one relating to Aborigines from the nearby reservation, Wallaga Lake, and another relating to a visiting Aborigine from South Australia, which complicated the picture of race relations in the town:

MB: Any of the kids that went to school, the Aborigine kids, they would mix with the others alright. But the kids from out of town—When the pool was built here in about 1970, the pool opened and a lot of Aborigine children came up from the Lake. They used to have a Manager of the Lake in them days and he dropped these five little Aborigine kids in town – they would have been about ten to about eight years old. And my daughter was down there and she said, 'Mummy, these little Aborigine kids come up and all the other kids got out of the pool. They wouldn't swim with them.' 'Oh,' I said, 'Oh, come on, never mind. Here, take the beach ball down and go and play with them.' And the little sister went down with her and at eleven o'clock she came back with these five Aborigine kids! 'Oh,' I said, 'you'll have to take them back, the Manager will be here looking for them.' She said, 'No, he's not coming back until one o'clock. Can they come to Sunday School?' and I said, 'Oh, I don't think so.' And I gave them some cake and they went back to the pool. She was looking after them and she said, 'We played at the pool and the other kids got in eventually.'

KB: Really? And where do you think they had learnt that from? If you're saying that they were used to Aboriginal kids from the school so what made them do that to the Wallaga Lake kids?

1. Although, it is interesting to note that the family themselves told of incidents of racism and problems settling into the town for the first few years before becoming fully accepted by the small community (Morgan 1994: 95).

MB: Oh I don't know. Just bigoted, very bigoted they were. People were very bigoted against the Aborigines. My husband carted them in the taxis for years and it never made any difference to us. I know one day, when we had corn picking going on or something, this chap came to the door and he wasn't like our Aborigines, he was jet black – black as the ace of spades – and he was a South Australian Aborigine looking for a job. And my little son, he was only about three, he raced to the door – there was always a race to see which of the two little boys opened the door – and he backed back from the door and he said, 'Mummy, there's a bloody big black fella at the door.' And I said, 'Oh!' I didn't know what to do. I went to the door and I got a shock myself when I saw this jet black Aborigine. And he said, 'Look, Mrs, you should bring your children up better than that, we are Aborigines, we are not blacks.' And he stood there rousing at me. And I said, 'Oh, I'm very sorry but you must admit you are very dark, darker than our gentlemen round here.' I said, 'My children are used to Aborigines.' And he said, 'I should hope so. I'm looking for a job.' And I said, 'Well, you'll have to see the boss. He won't be home until five o'clock.' That was the end of that but, boy, I did get into trouble for bringing my kids up wrong! (Blacka 2006: 7–8)

This exchange is interesting in that it reveals the complexities of small-town race relations in the 1970s. When prompted to say more about the treatment of the Wallaga Lake kids at the pool, May admitted to a lot of 'bigotry' amongst the white townspeople, which had not been mentioned previously. Her anecdotes also revealed the subtle negotiations she entered into regarding what was possible and what was not. For example, she encouraged her kids to play with the Aboriginal kids from Wallaga Lake but did not think she should allow them to go to Sunday school with her children. She also tells a story against herself when she relates being scolded by the man from South Australia, relating her embarrassment when her young son hollered to her in amazement while also justifying her son's response because of the particularly dark shade of the man's skin.

A final anecdote about race was prompted as May was leafing through her old journal, which concerned some Aboriginal children who were taken into care by the white authorities:

MB: '*Five Aborigine children, three girls and two boys: A sad tale*'. The police came down to get the boss, who was a JP, to sign about 35 forms. He wasn't very happy because it was the end of the month. And these five little children were taken away.

KB: Why were they taken away?

MB: Because their mother had died and they couldn't look after them. They were put in foster homes. It was very sad because you'd see them and they'd be as skinny as rakes – poor little things with runny noses and no clothes on. It was cruel to see. They say, 'They've been taken away from their homes' and all this. That's a load of crap. In that case, the Manager of the Lake said that the boy, Andy, couldn't handle them and the aunts and uncles didn't want them so they had to go somewhere. There are ones that talk about them being snatched away but they would have starved to death if they haven't been taken. I forget where I put that about the floods. It took all the bridges, five bridges it took. (Blacka 2006: 10)

It is my reaction, in particular to the last anecdote, which causes me discomfort. At the time, I was ashamed that I did not interrogate this story further. May was clearly critical of those people who today contend that Aboriginal children were taken away from their community. In her view, the children in question were suffering from neglect and needed to be better taken care of. She strongly believed this care was not available in the children's local Aboriginal community.

My discomfort came from my immersion in the discourse of the stolen generation, about the systematic removal of Aboriginal children from their parents across Australia. I came to this anecdote complete with a sense of guilt that white Australia was responsible for this process and so, while I shared May's concern for the welfare of the children, I found myself drawing a different conclusion about what would have been best for the children. However, instead of opening up a discussion about the matter, I was unable to voice my difference of opinion. Instead, May changed the subject to local floods and I let her do so, secretly relieved that my moment to say something had passed and the conversation had moved on. In fact my contribution to this part of the interview consisted of a series of 'mmm' sounds, which variously reflected encouragement and discomfort. I was discomposed because I liked and respected May who had endured much hardship in her life past and present but who had managed to maintain her stoicism together with a wry sense of humour. I didn't want May to say things that I found confronting because it problematized our relationship and my role as interviewer sitting with scone in hand, encouraging responses, yet feeling unable to criticize when the subject matter divided us.

Segregation in cinemas and the wider questions of race relations that the topic invites are caught within competing and differential discourses on race and Aboriginality that have changed over time and differ among groups. Speaking of racial segregation at the cinema is difficult because there are so few public accounts available in which to situate personal experiences and because it is not a comfortable reminiscence topic for white audience members. Thus it is largely silenced. As we go beyond the disavowals that informal segregation just happened or happened for non-racially motivated reasons, we find more difficult anecdotes, like May's, which contextualize cinema-going practices among the contradictory racial discourses of the time and those available in the present. The difficulty for interviewee and interviewer in speaking easily about the subject is compounded by the conversational expectations and social niceties that govern the interview relationship.

A possible framework for examining this situation is Derrida's concept of hospitality. Derrida sees hospitality as a practice of welcoming the other but is clear that hospitality is conditional in that there is an unequal relationship between 'guest' and 'host' whereby the host is in control of the home and the activities that go on inside it. Derrida examines the possibility of 'unconditional hospitality' where there are no guarantees about who the other might be or what the other might do. He contends:

> For unconditional hospitality to take place, you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing

> everything or killing everyone […] Those are the risks in pure hospitality, if there is such a thing, and I'm not sure that there is.
>
> (Derrida 1999: 71)

However, Derrida suggests that conditional hospitality implicitly contains the possibility of the unconditional. If a guest is really to feel welcomed and 'at home' there has to exist the possibility that the host surrenders all limits and places the home completely under the guest's control.

In relation to the oral history interview in question, the exchange took place in the home of the interviewee. May welcomed us into her home, provided tea and scones and shared her collection of local municipal documents and records with us. As guests, we were bound to act within certain limits and expectations including politeness and respect for local views and customs. This makes it difficult to raise contentious issues, let alone pursue them and risk generating an uncomfortable conversational moment or discomposure. Against these conditions of hospitality, I would argue that our duties as inquisitive academic researchers or as holders of a different personal point of view from our host on specific issues were subordinate to maintaining the guest–host relationship. What makes it uncomfortable is that one aspires to the promise of unconditional hospitality, of a true welcome without conditions or compromise. When this possibility is curtailed, the limits of hospitality are clearly revealed. As Fiona Allen has it:

> It is within these encounters with the stranger […] that one must address the actualities of the dialogue and the terms on which it will be conducted. These moments of unease and difficulty, newness and surprise – this *aporia* – when everything is not ready in advance and you are completely unprepared, force one to actually consider how the space of the exchange is constructed.
>
> (Allen 2006: 47–48)

Returning to Probyn's analysis of shame, she contends that it can be potentially transformative in that it takes us outside of our conforming selves to other possibilities:

> […] where I depart from Bourdieu is in my wager that blushing and feeling shame set off a nearly involuntary re-evaluation of one's self and one's actions. This may also compel a radical rethinking and a shift in disposition. Through feeling shame, the body inaugurates an alternative way of being in the world. Shame, as the body's reflection on itself, may reorder the composition of the habitus, which in turn may allow for quite different choices.
>
> (Probyn 2005: 55–56)

I think this is a useful contention. Certainly, through the conversational moment of discomposure I experienced, I now have a greater awareness of such situations together with an intention to delve deeper into difficult subjects while remaining within the bounds of hospitality.

Probyn's analysis is also applicable to the shame that threatened to encroach on the narratives of Isabel Flick and of the white cinema-goers interviewed about segregation. For Isabel, the incident at the Collarenebri

cinema was pivotal in her life's course. In that moment when she stood, feeling sick, waiting to see if the cinema manager or herself would back down first, I would argue that she was inaugurating 'an alternative way of being in the world'. Isabel was rescued from further shame by the positive result of her actions.

I think this process was also evident in May's interview where her first reaction was that there were no racial tensions at the Cobargo picture hall but where her subsequent stories began to open up a more complex reading of race relations within the town. What will be interesting will be to return to some of the white audience members interviewed about segregation to see if, following the discomposure of the first interview, a different consideration of informal segregation emerges.

With the help of oral historians, cultural researchers and critical theorists, I hope I have demonstrated how an analysis of the way in which aspects of cinema-going are narrated can shed light on how practices of cinema-going are situated within wider cultural discourses of the past and present. In this way narrative strategies, silences, moments of discomposure, 'errors, inventions and myths lead us beyond facts to their meanings' (Portelli 1991: 2).

References

Allen, F. (2006), 'Between Sydney and Hong Kong: Doing Cultural Research without Guarantees', *Cultural Studies Review*, 12: 2 (September), pp. 47–48.

Billig, M. (2001), 'Humour and Embarrassment: Limits of "Nice-Guy" Theories of Social Life', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 18, pp. 23–44.

Coates, J. (1995) 'Language, Gender and Career' in S. Mills (ed.), *Language and Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, New York: Longman, pp. 13–30.

Derrida, J. (1999), 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in R. Kearney and M. Dooley (eds), *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 65–83.

Derrida, J. and Dufourmantelle, A. (2000), *Of Hospitality*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Flick, I. and Goodall, H. (2004), *Isabel Flick*: *The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Goffman, I. (1956), 'Embarrassment and Social Organisation', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 62: 3 (November), pp. 264–71.

Morgan, E. (1987), *The Calling of the Spirits*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Passerini, L. (1987), *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Portelli, A. (1991), *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Probyn, E. (2005), *Blush: Faces of Shame*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Roseman, M. (2006), 'Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (2nd edn.), Oxford: Routledge, pp. 230–43.

Scheff, T.J. (1990), *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotion and Social Structure*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Summerfield, P. (2004), 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 6, pp. 69–70.

Thomson, A. (1994), *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Yow, V. (2006) '"Do I like them too much?": Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-versa', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (2nd edn.), Oxford: Routledge, pp. 54–72.

Oral history interviews cited

Bain, M. and Bain P. (1999), interviewed by Nancy Huggett, 15 May.

Bega Resident 1. (2006), interviewed by Nancy Huggett, 11 August.

Bega Resident 2. (2006), interviewed by Kate Bowles and Nancy Huggett, 11 August.

Blacka, M. (2006), interviewed by Kate Bowles and Nancy Huggett, 3 December.

Nichols, M. (1995), interviewed by Nancy Huggett, 26 August.

Schaefer, B. and Sutherland, N. (2006), interviewed by Kate Bowles and Nancy Huggett, 3 December.

Suggested citation

Huggett, N. (2007), 'Everyone was watching! Strategies of self-presentation in oral histories of cinema-going', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 261–274, doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.261/1

Contributor details

Nancy Huggett is Manager of Corporate Governance at the University of Wollongong where she also lectures on cinema studies. Nancy is an oral historian and is currently a research fellow on the ARC project, 'Regional Markets and Local Audiences: Case Studies in Australian Cinema Consumption, 1928–1980'. Contact: Social Science, Media and Communications, University of Wollongong Building 36, Northfields Avenue, North Wollongong, NSW, 2522.
E-mail: nhuggett@uow.edu.au

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.275/1

Twice born: Dionysos Films and the establishment of a Greek film circuit in Australia

Deb Verhoeven *RMIT*

Abstract

From the late 1940s until the late 1970s Melbourne was home to a dynamic Greek cinema circuit made up of some 30 different inner-city and suburban venues operated by a handful of vertically integrated exhibition/distribution businesses. Dionysos Films was amongst the first Greek film exhibition/distribution companies to form in Australia and from 1949 until 1956 it operated with little significant competition, establishing the parameters for a diasporic Greek film circuit that stretched across regional and metropolitan Australia and into New Zealand. This article measures the shadow cast by Dionysos Films (and its charismatic proprietor Stathis Raftopoulos) over the history of Antipodean Greek film experiences and the implications that this neglected aspect of Australian and Greek film history has for our understanding of the national cinemas in both countries.

Keywords

migrant audience
foreign-language film
art cinema
cinema-going
diaspora
Greek cinema

Introduction

> 'How differently Dionysus spoke to me!'
>
> (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872))

Dionysos, the Greek god of wine occupies a peculiar place in the Olympian pantheon. The patron deity of agriculture and theatre, Dionysos belonged to two realms, mortal and divine, and according to various birth stories, he was born twice after a difficult and contested gestation. For post-war Greek migrants in Australia experiencing the manifold and complicated naissance of life in the diaspora, the name Dionysos held a further significance. Dionysos Films was one of the first commercial companies to undertake regular Greek film screenings in Australia and was the precursor to a highly accomplished transnational business enterprise specializing in the screening of films to Greek diasporic audiences.

The breadth and success of this film circuit gives rise to a series of questions about the originary claims typically made for national cinemas, claims that rely on defining acts of creative production (rather than consumption) and a preference for straightforward attributions of patrimony (Greek cinema belongs to, or arises from, Greece; Australian cinema to Australia and so on). In Australia such originary tropes are especially

evident in discourses of a 1970s film 'renaissance' in which the national cinema is reconceived entirely as a domestic production industry. And yet in one of the creation myths of the Australian film renaissance, the catalyst for reconfiguring 'Australian' cinema as a history of film production centres on an experience of cinema-going, in fact a very personal experience of going to the movies. Indeed in the mind of its self-proclaimed progenitor, Phillip Adams, the very genesis of the Australian film production revival in the 1970s can be directly traced to his teenage experiences watching foreign-language films at Melbourne's Savoy cinema. For Adams, it was these European film experiences, notably his viewing of *One Summer of Happiness* (Mattson, 1951), that both inspired him to become a filmmaker and suggested a destination for his later research into the revival of the local film industry.

Foreign-language cinema and the Australian film renaissance

Reliving his early cinephilia Adams describes himself and his fellow audience members at the Savoy with typical self-deprecating humour: 'On the one hand our pulses quickened to Bill Haley and the Comets. On the other, we acned intellectuals saw ourselves as *European*' (Adams 1982: 4; original emphasis). But despite their happy internal accommodation of both European intellectualism and American popular culture, Adams also describes how this same audience understood their attendance at the Savoy as if it involved crossing a significant threshold:

> It took a lot of courage to go to the Savoy for the first time. Finally whether it was all that cappuccino heating the blood or simply the sap of puberty rising, we made it across the foyer. And in 90 enthralling minutes our lives were changed forever. We realized that foreign countries weren't merely travel posters, that human relations could be filmed with a simplicity that would have horrified Hollywood, and that there was something beyond sex – beyond shelter-shed gropings and backstall fumblings – that involved a deep and transforming emotion […] We went into the Savoy as smutty little boys and came out as lovers.
>
> (Adams 1982: 4)

In this brief anecdote Adams overlays mutually expanding geo-spatial, cultural, intellectual and moral horizons all of which coalesce around a particular experience of cinema-going. Adams' description of his attendance at the Savoy gives full force to the complete range of meanings that have come to be associated with the idea of being 'worldly'; in which being *European* is allied with a kind of sexual and emotional maturity not otherwise found in (Hollywood) cinema or in mainstream 1950s Australian culture. Here Adams follows the lead of many art-film critics and aficionados who seek to distinguish the art cinema's 'eroticism' from the disreputable sexuality of exploitation genres; even though art-film exhibitors themselves were perhaps not so circumspect, frequently resorting to sexual innuendo in promoting these films to prospective audiences (Hawkins 2000: 22).

More specifically, Adams proposes a direct link between the distribution and exhibition of foreign-language art cinema in Australia and the later arrival of the Australian production industry itself:

> So when Barry Jones and I finally went round the world to see how we might revive the Australian industry, it was no accident that we made a bee-line to Stockholm. It was the Swedish industry, not America's, that was to be our model.
>
> (Adams 1982: 4; see also Verhoeven 1995)

If the revitalized production industry took Adams' elaborations of his new-found 'worldliness', in all its metaphoric glory, to mean that there might exist a reciprocal global interest in Australian film then they were sorely disappointed. On safer ground, cultural nationalists embraced the Australian cinema's 'European turn', as described by Adams, by articulating its cultural relevance as an example of the local resistance to the overpowering charms of Hollywood (for example, Dermody and Jacka (1987); see Verhoeven (2006) for a further elaboration on this point).

This demarcation between the Australian national cinema of the 1970s and its Hollywood nemesis is expressed in a series of interlinked binary oppositions that centre on the geo-conceptualization of film production sites for their organizing structure:

Hollywood	vs	National art cinemas of Europe or Asia
Moral and emotional clichés	vs	Frank sexual, emotional content
Formulaic plots	vs	Innovative narrative structures
Prescribed visual codes	vs	Inventive, sometimes experimental aesthetics

In this arrangement Australian film production is typically aligned with foreign-language art cinema as an alternative to Hollywood genre film. From the mid-1970s this arrangement also held sway over the way the exhibition of Australian films was organized in Australia. For many years after the film revival one of the typical ways to see an Australian film was at an art-house cinema where the local idiom could be heard amidst a wide array of foreign-language films.

The organizing structure outlined above is most meaningful if it is widely assumed that the dominant cinema (Hollywood) is both universal and without accent. If the type of US accent popularized in Hollywood movies, sometimes described as 'mainstream US English' or MUSE (Lippi-Green 1997), is considered the norm, then accented films (i.e. those using non-MUSE dialogue including those in the local version of English) might as well be 'foreign-language' movies; or so the logic goes. The infamous story of how the Australian film *Mad Max* (Miller, 1979) was dubbed into MUSE for its American release is often cited as a case in point, though there were others such as Peter Weir's *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974)

which was re-cut, dubbed and re-titled, *The Cars That Ate People* for its US release. By the 1970s, reviews of Australian films in the US trade journal *Variety* frequently commented on the incomprehensibility of the accents, and key industry figures saw the international perception of Australian films as 'foreign' as an obstacle to the industry's success (see Walsh (2000) for an elaboration of these debates; also Sergrave (2004: 171–72)). But industry figures might equally have wished Australian films were *more* 'foreign', thus enabling their distribution in America along the same lines as European films (also derived from middle-sized national cinemas). Instead, in the United States, Australian films like *The Cars That Ate Paris* were considered not quite foreign and aesthetically high-brow enough to 'deserve' art-house subtitles and yet not American and generic enough to avoid dubbing. What remains of interest is the way Australian films of the revival period were attributed the status of foreign-language films in both international and domestic markets.

In fact the combined programming of local and foreign-language films in art-house cinemas highlights an aspect of Australian film consumption that is generally overlooked in cultural analysis. Rather than simply stressing a neat division between majority audience submission to Hollywood dominance and minority audience commitment to Hollywood's vulnerable Others (both 'foreign' and local) it might also be valuable to characterize the screening of foreign-language cinema *alongside* locally accented films as enabling the 'foreign' to play a more multifaceted role in shaping the substance of Australian culture, more so than previously assumed by media theorists and historians. For example, the detailed commercial and cultural processes by which an audience for *both* foreign-language art cinema and Australian film was interpellated and normalized in the 1970s suggests that there was, and perhaps is, a more dynamic relationship between developments in the organization and experience of cinema-going, and wider polity shifts such as the mainstream promulgation of multiculturalism. And as with most oppositional logics, there is a lot missing from the carefully divided picture, Hollywood versus Others: the failure to see Hollywood films in the auteurist mode for example (as art); the failure to understand how for many Australians the American cinema has historically spoken a 'familiar but foreign' form of English (a charge not usually laid against British films); the failure to recognize the international (and Hollywood) dimensions of so much 'art-cinema' production; the failure to see how imagining Hollywood's 'otherness' contributed to its success with distant, aspiring audiences; more specifically a failure to see how, from the 1950s onwards, the consumption of Hollywood cinema in Australia was literally being de-familiarized with new audience demographics and market segmentations emerging in the wake of technological and social change.

For the purpose of my research there is another glaring deficit in this particular creation story and this is the absent account of the foreign-language *popular* cinema which was being widely screened in Australia at the very same time Phillip Adams sat savouring the delights of his subtitled Swedish temptresses. Alongside the art cinemas, and occasionally in cooperation with them, there existed a network of venues screening non-art cinema fare to large audiences of migrants. Whilst the venues were language-specific in orientation, the range of films screened at them was not.

The programming of an international selection of popular films at Greek venues for instance meant that audiences attending these cinemas could see (sometimes subtitled) films from Hollywood as well as other popular non-English-language films such as those produced in India, Turkey, Egypt, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. The first commercial release of a Dutch film in Australia, the domestic hit comedy *Wonderlijke Leven van Willem Parel* (Gerard Rutten, 1955) occurred in a Greek cinema. When things got tight and audience numbers contracted in the late 1970s these same cinemas began screening R-rated films as well as their staple fare of comedy and melodrama. Greek audiences in 1950s and 1960s Melbourne experienced their domestic cinema like art-house Australians did some decades later with Greek films typically programmed in combination with 'foreign-' (i.e. not Greek-) language films. So whilst Adams, along with a (mostly) Anglo Saxon audience at the Savoy watched, let us say, Elli Lambeti's tribulations in Michael Cacoyannis's movie *A Matter of Dignity* (*To Teleftio Psema*) (1958), just a few city blocks away a booming Greek cinema circuit could be found – screening popular melodramas and comedies starring domestic divas such as Aliki Vougiouklaki and Rena Vlahopoulou to migrant audiences in Melbourne, more widely to audiences in other capital cities around Australia, to audiences in regional centres and as far afield as New Zealand and South Africa; a circuit that had already screened *To Teleftio Psema* some months prior to the Savoy.

It was not uncommon for films screening as popular melodrama in one venue to become the stuff of serious art down the road at another (and vice versa). As Victor Perkins notes, the distinction between art cinema and popular cinema in largely one of context:

> Thus a film fully accessible to its French audience will no longer belong to the popular cinema when it arrives in England equipped with subtitles […] Factors of these kinds contribute to processes whereby movies popular in their countries of production enter the structures of art cinema abroad.
>
> (Perkins 1992: 196)

Perkins's observation about subtitles, however, is also culturally specific. Hollywood movies, for example, were screened with subtitles in diasporic Greek cinemas in Melbourne (as they were and are around the world) but they are not thought of as art films on this basis. What defines the distinction between Melbourne's Greek cinemas and a cinema like the Savoy is the experience of a language in common both between audience members and on the screen. As Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (1992: 10) note in their introduction to *Popular European Cinema*, 'language is part of the complicity between film and audience'.

Accounting for Greek film exhibition and reception in Australia

> 'Overall, I consider myself an Australian, but I'd like to think that, when it comes to my film language, I am Greek.'
>
> (Bill Mousoulis 1999a)

For the most part, Greek film exhibition is not part of the story of the Australian cinema: Phillip Adams was not the only one seemingly blind to this multi-language popular cinema circuit. Many contemporary members of the trade were also ignorant of its scope. For example, prominent art-film distributor Sidney Blake claimed in 1963: 'there are four foreign film theatres in Sydney, three in Melbourne, and regular outlets in the other cities […] My films keep them busy most of the time' (Higham 1963: 18). Yet, if his numbers are wildly inaccurate (there were at least nine venues operating in the Greek circuit alone in Melbourne in 1963) Blake does posit a more interesting binary arrangement in his account of the foreign-language film market in Australia:

> Of course I have to bear in mind that there are two publics. The one is made up of about 80 p.c. migrants and 20 p.c. Australians – this is the non-intellectual, the non-arty public. This public wants a strong story, stars they've heard of at home if they're migrants, and an opening that isn't boring, that grips them right away […] And then of course there is sex. One must remember that. And then there's the other public – of students. There is now a big enough audience of students to fill a theatre for an arty film for quite some time.
>
> (Higham 1963: 18)

One must remember sex. In describing only two audiences for foreign-language films, Blake differs from Adams in that he puts sex in with the 'non-intellectual, non-arty' audience (made up mostly of migrants) and not with students who watch art films (which apparently do not feature sex).

However, the evidence suggests that up until the liberalization of censorship legislation in the early 1970s, films screened at Greek migrant venues were for the most part family-oriented comedies, religious epics and melodramas. As far as this circuit goes, censorship records and anecdotal accounts indicate that the key problem for the censor was not usually sexual content but the frequency of violent scenes featuring knives (Vlattas 2006; Anagnostou 2006b). In 1972, when R-rated films were first screened at the Greek cinemas, they were advertised separately from the regular Greek cinema programme notices in the *Neos Kosmos* newspaper, one of Melbourne's two Greek newspapers. These R-rated films were initially shown at one cinema only, the Liberty (which did not show family films), though shortly afterwards they also began screening at the Victoria and the Kinema (together forming an 'inner circuit' within the Greek venues). In remembering sex, the family-oriented entertainment of the Greek circuit seems to have been mislaid.

A possible explanation for why the screening of popular European cinema has been omitted from general accounts of Australian film history might lie in the imprecise language of their description: as examples of 'foreign'-language film exhibition. In her lonely volume *Hollywood Down Under*, the key work in Australian film history specifically devoted to the history of film exhibition, Diane Collins gives generally scant treatment to the screening of what she calls foreign-language films in the post-war period within which she alludes even more fleetingly to 'ethnic films' i.e. non-art-house foreign-language cinema (Collins 1987: 242–46).

Greek cinemas were not attended by Greek migrants in search of 'foreign'-language films, though many of the films screened in these venues were also heard in non-Greek languages. Nevertheless trade journals and later commentary continue to describe these cinemas as 'foreign-language' venues and even accounting for the commercial logic behind this ethnocentrism (Hollywood as the normative measure of the 'foreign') it still does not make sense since it was not uncommon for Hollywood films to be shown at them. Strictly speaking they are multi-language, mostly popular genre (i.e. non-art) cinema venues.

Another, perhaps more obvious, explanation is that, with the notable exception of Philip Adams's account, the existence of these cinemas is not directly linked to the project of Australian national film production. Migrant audiences, like audiences more generally, do not figure prominently in mainstream Australian film history, as doggedly interested as it is in all aspects of film production (Bowles et al. 2007: 96–97). So instead, when Greek-Australians are discussed in relation to the cinema, it is invariably to acknowledge their participation in the local industry as film-makers (Mousoulis 1999a, 1999b) or in terms of their representation in locally made films (e.g. Damousi and Freiberg 2003).

Bill Mousoulis's speculative account of Greek-Australian film production does make some interesting gestures towards incorporating the experience of film viewing into his analysis. He begins by trying to understand the relatively high proportion of Greek-Australian film-makers actively producing work across a range of genres, including notable directors such as Nadia Tass, Alex Proyas, John Tatoulis, George Miller, Nick Giannopoulos, Aleksi Vellis, Alkinos Tsilimidos, Ana Kokkinos and Stavros Kazantzidis (to name only a selection). Of these directors he asks two interrelated questions: 'Is your film language Greek? Is our film language Greek?' Mousoulis is working here with an expanded definition of 'film language', referring to the formal structure of film style as well as the philosophies, the ideas, the feelings contained in the films. Thus in creating a typology of the films made by Greek-Australian film-makers according to their 'language', Mousoulis identifies in the work of some of these directors a 'Hellenic sensibility'. He then continues by posing (but not really answering) a further question regarding the audience – 'Is it only Greeks who can understand these "Greek" films?' – in which he tantalizingly proposes the 'Hellenic sensibility' as both a category of production but also reception:

> Perhaps we Greeks are able to see things others cannot. And maybe then it is our responsibility to not let that seeing die. Maybe we can advise others on how to look, how to feel, when it comes to watching certain films.
>
> (Mousoulis 1999a)

For Mousoulis the Hellenic sensibility he identifies (but does not really elaborate) represents an alternative to the primary modes of watching permitted by American cinema. In this way of thinking, 'seeing' is really a category of production rather than film viewing. Mousoulis's real interest is in how Greek-Australian *film-makers* 'see' or at best, enable their audiences to see, a key assumption also taken up in the short debate that occurred in the article's wake. In 'Are Their Eyes Greek?', Vicky Tsaconas (2000)

takes issue with Mousoulis on the scope of his understanding of Hellenic sensibility but reiterates the key underlying idea that 'seeing' is most important as an aspect of the film-maker's rather than the audience's experience (to the extent that film-makers are not also audience members).

In so quickly abandoning the idea that 'film language' might be as much about dialogue as it is a matter for visual analysis, neither Mousoulis nor Tsaconas consider seriously the role of hearing or listening (or speaking) as important defining features for understanding migrant cinema practices (and most especially as a feature of cinema-going). This omission is all the more telling for the discussion of Greek-Australian, or more broadly 'Hellenic', audience practices given the prominence of recent accounts of historical audience behaviour in Greece. Dimitris Eleftheriotis, for example, has written about the importance of speech and other forms of communication in the practice of open-air cinema-going in Greece in the 1960s in terms of the wider idea of 'interruption' (Eleftheriotis 2001: 184–92). For Eleftheriotis interruption occurs across all aspects of the cinema experience; the grind programming, the location of open-air cinemas amidst other buildings and activities, the critical role of the refreshment bar, the possibility of intrusive weather conditions and so on. Interruptions from the audience include all the expected reactions to a film – laughing or crying, shouting, whistling, clapping – but might also consist of other forms of participation, such as the recitation of well-known lines of dialogue and the asking or answering of questions on behalf of the on-screen characters. Discussions and arguments amongst audience members were not uncommon, with regular interjections arising from the floor concerning the quality of the film and more specifically the actions, motivations or morality of the characters. Eleftheriotis is especially concerned to point out the vast gap between this description of audience behaviour and the presumption on the part of a substantial amount of film theory, that the spectator is friendless, silent and wholly susceptible to the allure of the image.

Eirini Sifaki finds in Eleftheriotis's description of Greek cinema-going a type of Hellenic sensibility that is very different from the one proposed by Mousoulis. For Sifaki: 'there is something inherently Greek about open-air cinemas, a tradition of oral culture blended with cinemagoing, creating a particular viewing experience' (Sifaki 2003: 249). The further inference to be drawn from Eleftheriotis's and Sifaki's respective observations of Greek cinema-going is that whilst conventional film theory and history has given preference to issues arising from textual analysis, even when a hypothetical model of film viewing is instated, it relies on a specious, *culturally specific* set of ideas about cinema attendance: assumptions that rest on the idea that it is the films themselves that are of principal interest to audience members rather than the social experience of attending the cinema, for instance; assumptions about the primacy of the image-text in producing meaning for viewers rather than meaning arising from within a tradition of 'orality' in the form of dialogue and exchange; assumptions about the necessity for the viewing of films to be characterized by 'intactness' (both in terms of textual completion but also the 'coherence' of the film's reception) rather than understanding it to be typically fragmented and interrupted. These assumptions would also seem to apply to the vast majority of film theory produced in Australia and which might go some

way to explaining the absence of Greek migrant audience experiences in the historical record of the Australian cinema.

The important economic role of Greek film distributors and exhibitors in the post-war period is also glaringly absent from structural accounts of the Australian film industry. Instead the early, pre-war history of Greek exhibition activity is recorded in community histories and biographies such as Peter Prineas's *Katsehamos and the Great Idea* (2006) or Jean Michaelides's work (1987) on cinema pioneer Sir Nicholas Laurantus. A notable exception is Kevin Cork's concerted and as yet unpublished research on the Greek film exhibitors active in regional and rural New South Wales from the early years of the twentieth century until the late 1960s (Cork 1998; the work has been posted on the Internet). Cork's statistics are immediately impressive. He identifies 116 rural cinemas in New South Wales during this period that were operated at some point by Greeks across 57 different towns. Of the 66 Greek exhibitors the overwhelming majority (some 61 operators) were owners of a café or catering business when they entered the movie trade and they were responsible for the construction of 34 new cinemas. For the most part, Cork's thesis is concerned with the impact of these Greek family cinema businesses on local rural communities and vice-versa and Cork is quick to point out how this pre-war generation of Greek film exhibitors differed from those based in metropolitan areas in the post-war period:

> People may remember the mass immigration of the 1950s –60s and recall the ethnic cinemas around Sydney and Wollongong that were run by Greeks and screened mostly foreign dialogue films. The exhibitors at these were small in number and contributed little to the history of this state when compared to the much larger, earlier group of Greek immigrants who screened English dialogue pictures to millions of British-Australians in the days before television.
>
> (Cork 1998: n.p.)

Cork is particularly dismissive of what he sees as the 'enclave' entertainment businesses established in the wake of the popular uptake of television:

> By the late 1950s, when cinemas that screened English dialogue films were closing as television increased in popularity, the few Greek ethnic film exhibitors were able to buy cinemas in or close to enclave areas and screen foreign dialogue films to those who craved cheap entertainment in their native language. […] A negative aspect to the 'enclave' exhibitors was that, knowing the low socio-economic status of their patrons, they were disinclined to service the cinemas which were allowed to deteriorate to a point where, in at least two situations, government agencies forced them to close. […] The Greek exhibitors who came to New South Wales before the mass immigrations of the post-war years were a different type of immigrant. They were not able to seek the security of enclaves and exploit their compatriots' lack of English and homesickness because they, themselves, were in country towns where usually no more than one or two Greek families lived. As exhibitors, they screened English dialogue films because their audiences comprised British-Australians. Yet, they did so not out of regret, but out of

> the desire to become economically independent and to break the peasant cycle from which they and their forebears had come. They could all claim an Hellenic heritage, but the areas from which they came were different in their local customs and traditions. What did bind them together was their peasant background and, if they wanted to break out of that cycle, they had to take some major steps during the course of their lives. It was in the taking of these steps, making decisions to move out of refreshment rooms and into motion picture exhibition, that broke the peasant tie and made integration in the host country more easily achieved.
>
> (Cork 1998: n.p.)

For Cork, the post-war Greek exhibitors are of limited historical interest for a number of reasons: they 'exploited' the homesickness of their compatriots with 'cheap' Greek rather than quality Hollywood and British films; they deliberately failed to maintain an acceptable standard of accommodation for these entertainments because they did not respect their audience who were primarily Greek working class rather than rural 'British-Australians'; they did not encourage cultural integration but created instead myopic 'enclaves'; and they were not sufficiently aspirational in their business motivations but were prompted by 'regret'. These are highly presumptuous charges and deserve some detailed response.

The development and dimensions of the Greek diasporic cinema circuit in Melbourne

> 'Oh yes we saw dripping dramas, oh did we see dripping dramas, everything was a drama.'
>
> (Olga Black (2006))

The most rapid period of Greek migration to Melbourne began in the wake of the bilateral agreement on immigration between Australia and Greece that was signed in 1952. Between 1952 and 1974, some 220,000 Greeks came to Australia. Population statistics give some indication of the scale and pace of this movement to Melbourne in particular. In 1947 there were a mere 2,500 Greeks in Melbourne. By 1971 the city boasted more than 98,000. Melbourne remains the ethnolinguistic centre of Hellenism in Australia with a concentration of approximately 215,000 Greeks and Greek Cypriots compared to approximately 160,000 in New South Wales (Tamis 2005: 63). These figures probably underestimate the number of Greeks in Australia, since temporary Greek migrants would have been missed in the periods between censuses and census documents fail accurately to distinguish ethnic identity from nationality thereby missing ethnic Greeks born in places such as Turkey, Egypt or even the Australia-born children of Greek parents. On this basis Melbourne is sometimes described as the third largest Greek city (after Athens and Thessaloniki) though variations in the definition of the term 'city' suggest considerable caution is required in making this claim.

Between 1949 and the early 1980s a thriving cinema circuit made up of some 30 different inner-city and suburban venues operated to service this large Greek diasporic audience in metropolitan Melbourne. The first

publicly promoted screening of Greek films in Melbourne occurred in 1949. Dionysos Films presented *The Voice of the Heart* (*I foni tis kardias*) (Ioannopoulou, 1943) a film that had been previously screened in Sydney by the Hellenic Talkies Company (operated by the Camillos Brothers) for which the company acted as agent. Dionysos, however, would very quickly overtake the Camillos Brothers as Australia's principal importer of Greek cinema. In the ten years that followed this pioneering screening around ten different exhibition/distribution businesses were established with varying degrees of success; the largest of the competing interests throughout this period was Dionysos Films.

Company founder, Stathis Raftopoulos (aka Stan Raftopoulos, Efstathios Raftopoulos, Stan Raft and 'Rafto the Magnificent') was a charismatic community figure; at any given time a poet, teacher, magician, printer, restauranteur, actor, prize-winning wrestler, film-maker, successful businessman and philanthropist (Figure 1). In regards to the latter, a percentage of profits earned from the Melbourne screenings of *I foni tis kardias* (and later films) were used by Raftopoulos to assist the purchase of resources for schools in the newly established post-war Greek communities ('T.E.' 1970: n.p.). Raftopoulos was an active member of AHEPA, a key Greek philanthropic organization in the Australian diaspora, the Ithacan Philanthropic Society, the Greek Community Association, the Hellenic RSL sub-branch and the Greek-Australian Writer's Association. He was also a founding member of the Greek-Australian Cultural League of Melbourne (GACLM) and its vice president for some years. His civic contribution was recognized in 1982 when he received an MBE for his services to the Greek community. As a poet Raftopoulos was in great demand, particularly for his orations at funerals but also for his satirical epigrams both of which were based on a capacity to distil personal characteristics with pithy precision. But he was also happy to wheel out a poem or two during unexpected breaks in the movie programme. Author, and friend, Kyriakos Amanatidis notes that Raftopoulos's interest in cinema stemmed from a popularist leaning which was also evident in his approach to poetry (Amanatidis 2006). Raftopoulos never read from notes and seldom failed to move an audience. In Amanatidis's observation Raftopoulos, who arrived in Australia as a 14-year-old pre-war migrant, held a unique community position as an intermediary between the pre- and post-war Greek migrant cultures. Born on Ithaca in 1921, Raftopoulos moved to Australia in December 1934 following his father Spiro who had gone to Australia in 1922 and his grandfather who had emigrated in 1895, a typical chain migration pattern. Unlike his pre-war contemporaries he was not well integrated into the Australian community, despite serving as an entertainer for the Australian military, and he maintained a very strong attachment to Ithaca (as both a destination and an idea) which he made manifest later in his life when he built a striking obelisk on the island, dedicating it to 'the memory of past generations who for a thousand years cultivated the soil of Ithaca, to remain here till the end of time'.

Between 1950 and 1954 Raftopoulos' company, Dionysos Films, was the sole distributor of Greek films in Australia but his success in establishing regular programmes during this period soon attracted imitators. At the

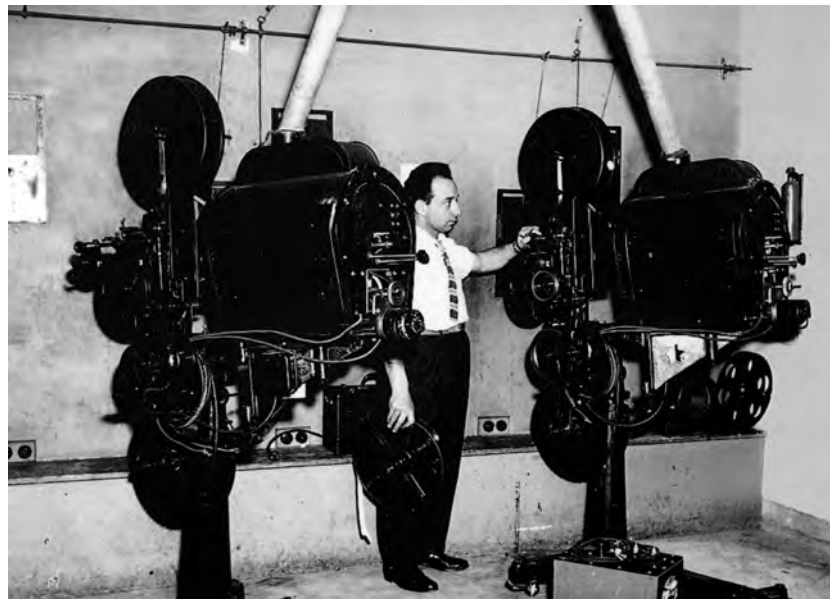


Figure 1: Stathis Raftopoulos in the projection room at the Nicholas Theatre/ Hall, 1950, Courtesy Stathis Raftopoulos Collection, RMIT Australian-Greek Resource and Learning Centre.

very end of 1955 a new player, Andreas Papadopoulos (Olympia Films), screened the first of several films, *I Swore to Take Revenge* (*Orkistika ekdhikissi*) (Novak, 1952). In 1956, a spate of Greek film imports arrived and not all destined for the Greek cinemas. *The Barefoot Battalion* (*Xypolito tagma*) (Tallas, 1953) was shown in 1956 for the first time, brought by Ray Films, an Australian art-house organization, playing at the Lyceum Theatre in Bourke Street for a month and then later in Sydney. Angelo Mallos (Grecian Films) brought *The Sunday Awakening* (*Kyriakatiko xypnima*) (Cacoyannis, 1954). Kyriakos Nikitarakos (Parthenon Films) brought *The Open Sea* (*Anihti thalassa*) (Meletopoulos, 1954) to the Carlton Theatre. Other names involved in the industry at this time, Dimitri Candilioti, Panayioti Raftolpoulos and others like Andreas Christodoulou (*Maria Pendayiotisa*) (1957), were only temporary operators bringing out one to two films at the most. But in 1957 a new competitor with serious credentials entered the fray. Peter Yiannoudes (New World Entertainment) exhibited with great success the very popular remake of the very popular *Golfo* (Laskos, 1955). Yiannoudes was an experienced operator having worked in the film industry in Cyprus from the age of 12 before coming to Australia where he worked for Hoyts as an assistant projectionist. Through his Cyprus networks and his personal relationship with Philopemen Finos, he was able to establish an exclusive arrangement with Finos Films giving him access to a regular stream of high-quality films. Like Raftopoulos, Yiannoudes was an energetic showman and between 1958 and 1961 he travelled to more than 150 towns and villages around Australia carrying a portable 16mm projector in order to screen films to even the smallest Greek communities using prints copied from the 35mm ones he had brought into the country for metropolitan exhibition.

Yiannoudes's experience in screening *Golfo* reveals something of the tenor of entrepreneurism required as new players tried to enter the market. Finos Films' productions had proved too expensive for rival distributors but Yiannoudes took a gamble that the higher quality of their films would attract larger audiences and that there was sufficient curiosity about the latest remake of this popular title. Unable to secure a venue to show his film because the main place for four-walled exhibition, Nicholas Hall (adjacent to Melbourne's 'Greek precinct' in Lonsdale Street), was alternatively booked week-in week-out by Raftopoulos and Papadopoulos respectively, Yiannoudes approached the Melbourne Town Hall, which seated more than 2,500 people. He imported 5,500 leaflets from Cyprus, handing them out at the local Greek Orthodox church. The screening was a great success selling out two weeks in advance with queues of people turned away on the night. All this came to the attention of Hoyts who operated the Capitol Cinema directly opposite the Town Hall. The following Monday Hoyts tried to shut Yiannoudes down. In order to guarantee his booking at the Melbourne Town Hall, Yiannoudes undertook training as a firefighter and the screenings continued. Four sell-out screenings later and Yiannoudes was more than adequately compensated for the higher prices demanded by Finos Films. Raftopoulos and Papadopoulos on the other hand were limited by the vastly smaller seating of the Nicholas Hall which, even with a sell-out success, could only accommodate around 300–400 people per screening.

After 1958, Greek films in Melbourne were primarily screened in existing cinema buildings, purchased or leased for the express purpose of showing films to Greek audiences. Prior to this, venues were difficult to locate, especially in the city centre. This was not because there were no empty cinemas. Many cinemas had closed in the wake of declining attendances brought about in part by the introduction of television and other changes to both the organization of film exhibition and the economic circumstances of its consumers. Many of these cinemas, however, had caveats attached to their sale which prohibited their ongoing use as cinemas or, in one case, the Victoria in Richmond (operated by Stathis Raftopoulos's father, Spiro), which insisted on its use as a venue for English-language cinema only (i.e. it would only be sold as a going concern). Loula Anagnostou, who worked with her brother Stathis and father, Spiro in their respective exhibition enterprises describes the relative merits of four-walling (paying for the limited rights to use) multipurpose venues:

> Melbourne Town Hall took a lot more people. Nicholas Hall was a smaller hall, but it was cosy. We used to use that a lot, Nicholas Hall, it was lovely. But getting the screens up, in the Melbourne Town Hall, it was a great venture because the Town Hall wasn't made for films. It's very high. The auditorium there was only for music. So we had great difficulty in putting up screens and bringing them down again, because they were only allowed up for the nights that we had booked. It was pretty awkward at the time, if I remember rightly. Trying to get things going.
>
> (Anagnostou 2006b)

The practice of renting community or municipal halls meant that the Greek distributors/exhibitors were restricted to screening 5–6 films per

month, and had no exclusive claims on a venue, so without a regular supply they could forfeit their venue booking to a competitor.

Dionysos Films was the benchmark for all competitors entering the market in this period. The company achieved great success with the 1955 release of *The Beauty from Peran* (*I Ore tou Peran*) (Laskos, 1955) and a couple of years later repeated their good fortune with the colour remake of the first Greek talkie *The Lover of the Shepherdess* (*O Agapitikos tis voskopoulas*) (Paraskevas, 1956) not to be confused with the black-and-white film of the same title distributed in Australia at more or less the same time by Grecian Pictures. Raftopoulos was able to extend his audience capacity by screening interstate on a systematic basis, particularly in Adelaide and Sydney (but also travelling to Brisbane and Newcastle regularly). In addition, he dabbled with mixed success, in small-scale production activity. In December 1954 in Melbourne he screened, with a live voice-over commentary, *A Tour Through Greece*, a 16mm documentary he produced about his trip to Greece the previous year. The screening proved to be highly controversial. English-language media reports claimed that patrons had demanded their money back because of the poor quality of the film and that more than 16 police were called to calm the angry crowds. As the newspapers quoted one patron: 'The film was all taken out of focus. It is so blurry you cannot distinguish anything and the commentary is so bad that we cannot understand it – even though it is in Greek' (Anonymous 1954). Raftopoulos maintained that the controversy was the work of commercial competitors aiming to sabotage his screenings (Raftopoulos 1993; Anonymous 1954). Olga Black, an Australian-born Ithacan, attended one of the screenings in Melbourne, and clearly recalls the film's poor production values:

> It was badly taken, because he couldn't stabilise anything, especially on the boat the thing was going up and down with the boat, the camera, and as he was walking inside on the island, the camera was going with him. But when he was a stationary and taking something yes it was OK.
>
> (Black 2006)

The shaking may have been exacerbated by the fact that at one point in the film Raftopoulos inadvertently captured the 1953 Ithacan earthquake. But despite the less than ideal production values (and their palpable effect on the audience) Black does not recall the controversy and remembers the film fondly, her actual nausea a close affective approximation for the acquired home-sickness experienced by second-generation migrants:

> I remember getting quite green and seasick and just hanging on to my stomach and not wanting to make a fuss or hoping that nothing would happen to me that I would cause a big disturbance. Because I really didn't want to miss the film, because it was on Ithaca and it was Stathis with his home film, not video, which didn't exist, home film and he was on a boat himself trying to take the shore of Ithaca. And I can remember that clearly and it was going up and down and up and down and so was I and so was my stomach. That was the first film of Greece that I remember and it was in colour and beautiful sky, beautiful water and lovely greenery, because the island of Ithaca was quite green.
>
> (Black 2006)

In 1959 Yiannoudes also made a documentary about Macedonia that screened for ten weeks at the Fitzroy Town Hall ('Anything that was Macedonian was pretty popular in Melbourne') and many years later Raftopoulos and Yiannoudes would together attempt to produce a film called *The Long Shot*, this time a feature starring the 1970s screen-siren Abigail, but the film was never completed (Yiannoudes 2006).

The late 1950s was a period of especially intense business activity in the Greek circuit. In 1957 Chris Louis, a Greek-Australian real estate agent who had arrived in Sydney from Cyprus in the late 1940s, took up a lease on the Lawson Theatre in Redfern. Louis, like Raftopoulos in Melbourne, was a significant figure in Sydney's Greek community. He was the first Greek exhibitor in Australia to show Greek films on a daily basis and before too long he had leased or acquired twelve cinemas around the city as well as interests interstate (Table 1). Possibly inspired by Louis's example, the three most successful Melbourne-based distributors, Dionysos, New World and Olympia, decided to join forces and formed Cosmopolitan Motion Pictures (CMP) in 1958, whereupon they began an ambitious programme of cinema purchases, often with financial partners who provided them lease-back arrangements. Perhaps the most controversial of these purchases was the 1961 acquisition of the National Theatre, also known, for obvious reasons, as *to nifopazaro* (the bride market), and which was located only metres from Stathis's father's cinema the Victoria.

The amalgamation of the three most active companies into one united Greek exhibition/distribution outfit is of considerable interest. Shortly afterwards, in 1959, an article in *Nation* predicted dire days ahead for the exhibition of foreign films in Australia which it attributed to the divisiveness of the sector: 'the distributing and exhibiting interests involved in foreign films compete and squabble amongst themselves and now, faced with a real crisis, may disappear one by one' (Wade 1959: 20). Whilst this may well have been true for the often precarious art-cinema circuits in Melbourne and Sydney in this period it certainly did not represent developments in the Greek diasporic cinema.

What distinguished Raftopoulos, Papadopoulos and Yiannoudes from their other competitors was that they each went into the industry without another source of employment or income and they each brought different industry networks and skills to the table: Raftopoulos (with his philanthropic and community contributions); Papadopoulos (his business experience and connections in Greece); Yiannoudes (his film industry experience and Cypriot distribution connections). In forming CMP as a consortium of interests they aimed to make their business as professional as possible. The basis of the arrangement held that any films already contracted for distribution were exhausted as the property of the individual members but after an agreed period of time all titles became company assets and all forward decisions were made by all three. In addition, Yiannoudes and Louis (both Cypriots) were able to negotiate an agreeable division of territories to avoid conflict between Australia's two remaining large companies. CMP operated venues in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and West Australia. Louis exhibited throughout New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and New Zealand. It is also possible, but

not documented, that the agreement entitled Louis to exhibit in South Africa. Film titles contracted to both companies were therefore distributed throughout all major Australian capitals, key regional centres and internationally. Much later in the 1970s, after Andreas Papadopoulos left CMP, a new company was formed, LYRA Films, comprising the Sydney-based Louis (L), and the Melbourne-based Yiannoudes (Y) and Raftopoulos (RA).

Although there were many parallels in the business practices and audience experiences of the Melbourne and Sydney Greek cinema circuits there were many distinctions as well. For example, unlike CMP, Louis purchased several specific cinemas with a view to operating them for non-Greek audiences such as the Italian and Yugoslav communities respectively, a practice that did not occur in Melbourne because of the already well-developed Italian cinema circuit there. The sorts of films screened at these Italian venues, comedies and musicals, were highly popular with Greek audiences in Greece but because of the commercial distinction between the Greek and Italian circuits in Melbourne, Greek-Australian audiences were highly unlikely to have seen the popular comedies of Franco and Ciccio or the musicals of Al Bano or Romina Power for example (Eleftheriotis 2001: 193–94).

CMP was especially effective at limiting the number of potential competitors by aggressively blockading the Greek market through cinema purchases and options and using their capital to buy up large numbers of prints. Throughout the 1960s only two ongoing operations succeeded in breaking through. From 1959 Spiro Raftopoulos (Stathis's father) operated the Victoria as a venue specializing in subtitled English-language films for the Greek community in double bills with Greek features (see Bowles et al. 2007: 100–01 for a detailed discussion of the programming strategies at the Victoria). CMP eventually leased the theatre from him in 1967. At the end of the decade another competitor emerged. In 1966 Takis (Jim/Dimitri) Anagnostou (Stathis's brother-in-law), Nakis (Nikos) Raftopoulos (Stathis's brother), Jim and Nick Lazogas created United Cinematographic Enterprises which operated the Sunshine Theatre for a couple of years before it was taken over by CMP who ceased operating it but adopted their usual practice of maintaining an option on the building. CMP's competitiveness also extended to attempts from outside the Greek community to screen Greek films on a commercial basis. At one point an ambitious Italian importer brought in a Greek film provoking CMP to retaliate swiftly by importing fifty Italian films and threatening to screen them in cinemas close to the Italian circuit. Their near monopoly in the Melbourne Greek circuit also enabled them to control the price of the titles brought to Australia. Peter Yiannoudes remembers how Greek distributors became aware of the success of the Melbourne circuit and would try to lift their prices but CMP would simply refuse to buy their films, both parties realizing that if they were not bought by CMP they would not be screened (Yiannoudes 2006a). This strategy actually took quite a bit of nerve on the part of CMP given the cyclical nature of Greek exhibition and it sometimes meant holding out quite a long time.

Relationship to the Greek film industry

> 'If it wasn't for America and Australia, the Greek film industry in the duration of a number of years, maybe 5–10 years, would have been completely dead.'
>
> (Anna Vlattas 2006)

Year	Venue	Location	Company
1949	Nicholas Hall/Theatre	City, Melbourne	Dionysos; Olympia; Cosmopolitan Motion Pictures (CMP) (fourwalled)
1950	Empire	Leederville, Perth	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1954	Assembly Hall	City, Melbourne	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1954	Carrington	Newcastle	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1954	Lyric	West End, Brisbane	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1954	Maccabean	Darlinghurst, Sydney	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1954	Windsor	Lockleys, Adelaide	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1954	Attik	Fitzroy, Melbourne	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1955	Rialto	West End, Brisbane	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1950s	Paddington Town Hall	Paddington, Sydney	Dionysos; CMP (fourwalled)
1956	Curzon	Goodwood, Adelaide	Dionysos (fourwalled)
1956	Melba Theatre	Dulwich, Adelaide	(fourwalled)
1956	Carlton Theatre	Carlton, Melbourne	Olympia; CMP (leased)
1957	Lawson Theatre	Redfern, Sydney	Louis (leased)
1957	Melbourne Town Hall	City, Melbourne	New World Film Entertainment (NWFE); CMP (fourwalled)
1957	Thebarton Town Hall	Thebarton, Adelaide	Dionysos
1957	Odeon	Darlinghurst, Sydney	Dionysos (fourwalled) Louis (owned) from 1960
1958	Castley Hall	Sunshine, Melbourne	(fourwalled)

Table 1: List of metropolitan Greek cinema venues *(continued)*

(continued)

1959	Vesuvio	Newmarket, Melbourne	(fourwalled)
1959	Cathedral Hall	Fitzroy, Melbourne	CMP (fourwalled)
1959	Cosmopolitan	Brunswick, Melbourne	CMP
1959	Dendy	Brighton, Melbourne	Spiro-Raft Theatres (SRT), CMP (fourwalled)
1950s	Doncaster Theatre	Kensington, Sydney	Dionysos (fourwalled); leased by Louis in 1959
1960	Victoria Theatre	Richmond, Melbourne	SRT (owned); CMP (leased)
1961	National	Richmond, Melbourne	CMP (owned)
1962	Pantheon	Adelaide, Adelaide	CMP
1963	Globe	Richmond, Melbourne	SRT; CMP (leased)
1963	Sun	Yarraville, Melbourne	CMP (owned)
1964	Pantheon	Prahran, Melbourne	SRT; UCE; CMP (leased)
1964	Oreon [primarily for Italian audiences]	Petersham, Sydney	Louis (owned)
1964	Kinema	Albert Park, Melbourne	CMP (owned)
1964	Pantheon	Prahran, Melbourne	SRT (leased)
c. 1965	Marrickville Kings	Marrickville, Sydney	Louis (owned)
c. 1965	The Elite	Haberfield, Sydney	Louis (owned)
c. 1965	The Grosvenor	Summer Hill, Sydney	Louis (owned)
c. 1965	Apollo/Hoyts	Ashfield, Sydney	Louis (owned)
c. 1965	The Regent	Bankstown, Sydney	Louis (owned)
c. 1965	The Hub [principally for Yugoslav audiences]	Newtown, Sydney	Louis (owned)
c. 1965	Atlas/Chelsea	Earlwood, Sydney	Louis (owned)
1965	Whiteway	Port Kembla, NSW	Louis (owned)

1966	Empire	Brunswick, Melbourne	CMP (owned)
1966	Century	City, Melbourne	(fourwalled)
1966	Westgarth	Northcote, Melbourne	CMP (owned)
1966	Metropolitan	Brunswick, Melbourne	(fourwalled)
1966	Orient	North Fitzroy, Melbourne	(fourwalled)
1966	Cinema Italia	Clifton Hill, Melbourne	
c. 1966	Marina Theatre	Rosebery, Sydney	Louis (owned)
1966	Paramount	Oakleigh, Melbourne	CMP
1966	Sunshine	Sunshine, Melbourne	Lazogas (owned); United Cinematographic Enterprises (UCE); CMP (leased)
1967	Lyceum	City, Melbourne	(fourwalled)
1967	Astor	St Kilda, Melbourne	Tollis (owned) CMP (leased)
1967	Enmore Finos (Hoyts)	Newtown, Sydney	Louis (owned)
1968	Dendy	Brighton, Melbourne	UCE? (leased)
1972	Liberty/Galaxy	Brunswick, Melbourne	CMP (owned)
c. 1974	Padua [for Italian audiences, eventually leased to Italian circuit]	Brunswick, Melbourne	Louis (owned)
1975	Ascot Vale	Ascot Vale	CMP (leased)
1970s	State Theatre	North Hobart	(fourwalled)
n.d.	Universal	Fitzroy, Melbourne	
n.d.	Hindmarsh Town Hall	Hindmarsh, Adelaide	(fourwalled)
n.d.	Woodville Town Hall	Woodville, Adelaide	(fourwalled)
n.d	Christ Church Hall	Brunswick, Melbourne	(fourwalled)
Working List of Cinema uisitions and Leases (does not include subsidiary distribution arrangements with art-house venues); Metropolitan Greek film circuit (Australia)			

The period of expansion of the Greek cinemas in Melbourne closely coincides with the rise of the Greek film industry itself. Between 1950 (the end of the Greek civil war) and 1975 (the year in which important legislative changes to Greek television broadcasting were made) both the number of cinemas and the number of films produced in Greece reached unprecedented highs (Constantinidis 2002: 9–10). Throughout this period film production in Greece was dominated by six major studios: Finos, Anzervos, Novak, Spentzos, Karayannis-Karatzopoulos and Damaskinos-Mihailidis. But many other smaller production companies were also able to find distribution in Australia (e.g. Olympia, Hermes, Midas, Romilos, Faros, Cronos to name a few). At this time cinema-going constituted the most popular form of entertainment for Greek families (Soldatos 1999: 87–110).

By the mid-1960s the annual turnover of films produced in Greece was well over 100, making it one of the leading centres for film production in Europe. There are several factors that contributed to the sustained level of production of the Greek cinema. Films from this period were typically produced with low budgets (the average cost of a film in the mid-1960s was around US$30,000) and high audience yield (see Sifaki 2004). In 1967, for example, there were 500 open-air cinemas in Athens (with a population of 1.5 million), which, in the four months of the summer season, sold more than 31 million tickets, the vast majority of which were for Greek films. According to Dimitris Eleftheriotis, both the low cost and popularity of Greek cinema in this period can be attributed to the limited range of genres on offer (comedies and melodramas making up 90 per cent of all the films produced in the 1960s) and the absence of a highly stratified Hollywood-style star system (Eleftheriotis 1995: 238). According to Eleftheriotis, 'Unable to compete with foreign films in terms of production values, the Greek industry relied on the familiarity of the characters and the "Greekness" of the diegetic world of the films' (Eleftheriotis 1995: 238). As Eleftheriotis sees it, Greek films are, 'domestic in all senses of the word, they are made for domestic consumption, set in a domestic setting (never outside Greece) and are usually about domesticity' (Eleftheriotis 1995: 238). It is a neat summary but in his haste to be succinct, Eleftheriotis, like most other commentators on the Greek film industry of this period, elides the non-domestic market of the Greek diaspora.

One way of thinking about the relationship between Greek film production and its diffusion throughout the Greek diaspora is to describe the latter as an 'ancillary' market. Nowadays the term refers to markets created by new technology platforms (video, DVD, etc.). But before the advent of television, US films played exclusively in cinemas and its only ancillary markets were cinemas in international territories. In this historical sense an ancillary market was a subordinate but supportive market. That said, Australia's diasporic Greek cinema circuits are not exactly an ancillary market because, for the most part, there was little effective vertical integration between the Australian distribution/exhibition companies and Greece production outfits (unlike the relationship between the Hollywood studios and their operations in Australia, for instance). Further analysis is required to determine the extent to which domestic supply in Greece was dependent on sales in the Greek diaspora. It is highly unlikely, however, that there was any systematic response from Greek producers to 'market intelligence'

in Australia such as box-office data, particularly given the time-lag between a film premiering in Greece and its arrival in Australia some time later, often well after the close of the all-important Greek summer season and because most films screened in Australia were purchased outright (rather than returning box-office percentage to Greece). Even Finos Films, which did initially require a percentage of box-office on top of a flat fee, were persuaded to reconsider this system of contracting. In the late 1950s, Apollo Maglis, the distribution manager of Finos Films inspected several Melbourne venues after which their fees were reduced by 20 per cent and the requirement for a share of box-office was rescinded. In 1959 Maglis travelled with CMP's Peter Yiannoudes to India to buy films (including *Devdas* (Roy, 1955) and *Mother India* (Khan, 1957)) and after sending them to Cairo for subtitling into English and Greek, screened them in both Australia and Greece. There is also anecdotal evidence that Australian distributors/exhibitors financed some Greek production activity through pre-sales of particular titles.

Rather than being a true 'ancillary' market, then, diasporic exhibition and distribution might be more usefully described as operating like a 'supplementary' market in the Derridean sense, in which the 'supplement' is something added to an entity that is nominally complete but that admits its lack of completion by requiring an addendum or increment, and that is therefore replaced by the new compilation of entities. In this case, Greek diasporic cinema markets are both a surplus to the domestic Greek cinema, which is not reliant on their returns, and yet they replace the idea of the Greek national cinema as a geographically bound entity. Australia's diasporic film circuits have the effect of unsettling the idea that the Greek cinema was a purely domestic one. As well as enhancing the Greek cinema (through extending its reach) the Australian Greek film circuit's very presence underlines the absences in a unitary conception of national cinema in Greece. The supplementary market then functions as an addition and a replacement (Derrida 1996: 144–45).

Conclusion

> 'Aah, they were days of glory.'
>
> (Stathis Raftopoulos 2000)

Raftopoulos's choice of name for his company proved to be a prescient one. As a latecomer to Greek mythology, Dionysos carries with him a sense of foreignness as an internal quality, an outsider no matter where he is, and unlike most deities, he dies. For later commentators, the Dionysian is particularly characterized by this dissolution of boundaries (between foreign/familiar, mortal/divine and so on). In describing the role of post-war Greek film exhibitors, it would be easy to lapse back into unhelpful dualisms. The simple binary oppositions that are typically invoked to divide domestic from foreign do not work particularly well when describing the interlocking networks of diasporic cinema exhibition and distribution nor when attempting to capture the extraordinary complexity of diasporic audience experiences afforded by physical, social and emotional spaces including those of the cinema in involved and intricate ways. This complexity of movements and

interchanges across multiple borders – national, local and specific – varies no less than their magnitude or impact and captures something of what is entailed in understanding Melbourne's diasporic cinema experiences as an example of a located form of globalization in process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge in particular the research assistance of Michelle Mantsio in the production of this article. Thanks is also due to the many Greek cinema proprietors and patrons who have generously granted their time to us; special thanks to Peter Yiannoudes, Anna and Paris Vlattas, Chris Vlattas, Costas Margaritis, Loula Anagnostou, Olga Black, Kyriakos Amantidis and Kasiani Raftopoulos. Staff at the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, La Trobe University and the Australian-Greek Resource and Learning Centre, RMIT University have also been generous.

Ross Thorne, Dylan Walker and Daniel Catrice have lent their expertise at different stages of this research and Gerry Kennedy from the Cinema and Theatre Historical Society (CATHS) has been a constant support. This project was made possible by an Australian Research Council grant and was further supported by the Global Cities Institute and the School of Applied Communication at RMIT University.

Images are reproduced courtesy of the Stathis Raftopoulos Collection, RMIT Australian-Greek Resource and Learning Centre.

References

Adams, P. (1982), 'The Happiest Summer of All', *The Age*, 9 October, p. 4.

Anonymous (1954), 'Homeland Film Angers Greeks', Publication Unknown, 12 December, n.p. Article sourced from the Raftopoulos Clippings Collection, RMIT Australian-Greek Resource and Learning Centre.

Bowles, K., Maltby, R., Verhoeven D. and Walsh, M. (2007), 'More Than Ballyhoo? The Importance of Understanding Film Consumption in Australia', *Metro*, 152, pp. 96–101.

Collins, D. (1987), *Hollywood Down Under: Australians at the Movies, 1896 to the Present Day*, North Ryde: Angus & Robertson.

Constantinidis, S. E. (2002), 'The Greek Studio System', *Film Criticism*, 27: 2, pp. 9–30.

Cork, K. (1998), 'Parthenons Down Under: Greek Motion Picture Exhibitors in NSW, 1915 to 1963', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Sydney, posted by George Poulos in 2004. Available online at http://www.kythera-family.net Accessed 22 October 2007.

Damousi, J. and Freiberg, F. (2003), 'Engendering the Greek: The Shifting Representations of Greek Identity in Australian Cinema', in Lisa French (ed.), *Womenvision*, Melbourne: Damned Publishing, pp. 211–22.

Dermody, S. and Jacka, E. (1987), *The Screening of Australia, Volume 1: Anatomy of a Film Industry*, Sydney: Currency Press.

Derrida, J. (1976), *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dyer, R. and Vincendeau, G. (1992), 'Introduction', in R. Dyer and G. Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema*, London: Routledge, pp. 1–14.

Eleftheriotis, D. (1995), 'Questioning Totalities: Constructions of masculinity in the popular Greek cinema of the 1960s', *Screen*, 36: 3, pp. 233–42.

—— (2001), *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks*, New York and London: Continuum.

Hawkins, J. (2000), 'Sleaze Mania, Euro-Trash, and High Art: The Place of European Art Films in American Low Culture', *Film Quarterly*, 53: 2, pp. 14–29.

Higham, C. (1963), 'Foreign Films; Two audiences', *Bulletin*, 23 February, p. 18.

Lippi-Green, R. (1997), *Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*, London: Routledge.

Michaelides, J. (1987), *Portrait of Uncle Nick: A Biography of Sir Nicholas Laurantus MBE*, Sydney: Sydney University Press.

Mousoulis, B. (1999a), 'Is Your Film Language Greek? Some thoughts on Greek-Australian film-makers', *Senses of Cinema*, 1, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/1/greek.html
Accessed 20 October 2007.

—— (1999b), 'A Guide to Greek-Australian Film-makers', http://www.innersense.com.au/productions/writings/greek-australian.html.
Accessed 20 October 2007.

Nietzsche, F. (1967), *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner* (trans. Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books.

Perkins, V.F. (1992), 'The Atlantic Divide', in R. Dyer and G. Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema*, London: Routledge, pp. 194–205.

Prineas, Peter (2006), *Katsehamos and the Great Idea*, Sydney: Plateia.

Sergrave, K. (2004), *Foreign Films in America: A History*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.

Sifaki, Eirini (2003), 'Global strategies and local practices in film consumption', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 7: 3, pp. 243–57.

—— (2004), 'Filmgoing in Athens, Greece 1939–1954 [tables]', in E. Sifaki, *Jalons pour une histoire du cinéma en Grèce (1939–1954): pratiques culturelles, logiques commerciales et stratégies d'acteurs d'après la revue Kinimatographikos Astir*, thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle, pp. 402–16. Available from http://www.homerproject.org/projects/athens/tables.pdf
Accessed 20 October 2007.

Soldatos, Y. (1988), *History of Greek Cinema*, vol. 1, Greece: Aigokeros.

Tamis, A. (2005), *The Greeks in Australia*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Tsaconas, Vicky (2000), 'Are Their Eyes Greek?' *Senses of Cinema*, 4, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/4/greek.html
Accessed 20 October 2007.

'T. E.' (1970), 'All of Greece in a White Cloth', *Neo Patras* (*New Country*), 6 March, n.p.

Verhoeven, D. (1995), 'The Film I Would Like to Make': In Search of a Cinema (1927–1970)', in James Sabine (ed.), *A Century of Australian Cinema*, Melbourne: Reed Books, pp. 130–53.

—— (2006), 'Film and Video', in S. Cunningham and G. Turner (eds), *Media and Communications in Australia*, 2nd edn., Sydney: Allen & Unwin, pp. 154–74.

Wade, D. (1959), 'Crisis for Sub-titled Films', *Nation*, 20 June, pp. 19–20.

Walsh, M. (2000), 'Building a New Wave: Australian Films and the American Market', *Film Criticism*, 25: 2, pp. 21–39.

Interviews cited

Amanatidis, K. (2006), interview by M. Mantsio and D. Verhoeven, 9 March.

Anagnostou, L. (2006a), interview by M. Mantsio, 22 July.

—— (2006b), interview by M. Mantsio, 4 November.

Black, O. (2006), interview by M. Mantsio, 2 November.

Raftopoulos, S. (1993), interview by A. Tamis, 27 April.

—— (2000), interviewers unidentified, posted by 'Rainscratch' online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pORfzQtuZPQ on 13 October 2007. Accessed 5 November 2007.

Vlattas, A., Vlattas, P. and Margaritis C. (2006), interview by M. Mantsio and D. Verhoeven, 29 November.

Yiannoudes, P. (2006), interview by M. Mantsio and D. Verhoeven, 13 April.

Suggested citation

Verhoeven, D. (2007), 'Twice born: Dionysos Films and the establishment of a Greek film circuit in Australia', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 275–298, doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.275/1

Contributor details

Deb Verhoeven is Associate Professor of Screen Studies at the RMIT University. Contact: School of Applied Communication, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne 3001.
E-mail: deb.verhoeven@rmit.edu.au

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.299/1

Cinema in a small state: distribution and exhibition in Adelaide at the coming of sound

Mike Walsh *Flinders University*

Abstract

Most histories of Australian cinema have foregrounded film production but have little to say about film distribution and exhibition, which were more powerful sectors of the cinema industry in Australia. This study examines the distribution and exhibition of films in Adelaide's central business district and suburban circuits during the introduction of sound in 1928–29. In addition to analysing the impact of the new technology, this article looks at the way that film distribution in this period changed in response to a number of other factors including the switch to direct distribution, the rise of British production and the local politics of first-run exhibition competition. The article examines the structure of city and suburban exhibition in Adelaide and demonstrates that any analysis of the industry's response to sound technologies must take into account intensely local factors in order to explain the ways that different companies adopted varying industrial tactics during the diffusion of this new technology.

Keywords

Adelaide
film distribution
film exhibition
film sound
film history

Cinema is one of the major institutions of internationalism and/or cosmopolitanism in Australian culture yet Australian film policy has been habitually discussed, and Australian film history customarily formulated, within a culturally nationalist framework. The questions that have emerged from within this framework – Why have we not been able to make more films of our own? How is it that Hollywood did this to us? – are particularly ill-suited to understanding the actual workings of the industry. One reads either large amounts on the modest output of Australian film-makers and their against-the-odds heroics, or denunciations of the dirty international politics of the Hollywood octopus. John Tulloch's two books on Australian silent cinema, *Legends on the Screen: The Narrative Film in Australia 1919–1929* (1981) and *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning* (1982) neatly sum up this division.

The founding presumption and conclusion of this approach – the doomed, romantic struggle of Australian film producers – limits the definition of the Australian cinema industry to its smallest and least powerful sector, production, at the expense of incorporating distribution and exhibition, where Australian companies have often enjoyed considerable agency, and where there have been significant variations in industrial tactics. Needless to say, this limitation to production has also excluded Australian audiences from histories of Australian cinema.

There is a growing body of work, however, in recent film history that seeks to refocus attention on the social and industrial conditions under which films moved into local communities and interacted with national and regional distribution and exhibition structures. Over the past decade or so, we have seen studies such as those by Gregory Waller (1995) in the United States and Mike Hammond (2006) and Mark Jancovich (2003) in Britain with their studies of Southampton and Nottingham respectively. This work has used newspaper and trade sources, along with local history records to reinstate the local aspects of film distribution, exhibition and consumption.

My aim here in studying distribution and exhibition practices in South Australia at the coming of sound is twofold: to provide a stronger sense of the possibilities for local agency in accounts of national cinema histories, even among countries such as Australia whose screens have long been dominated by Hollywood product; and also to provide a more detailed, fine-grained account of the industry by creating space to account for a multiplicity of shifting approaches to distributing and exhibiting film, involving partial and unstable alliances between participants as they sought to operate in changing markets. The coming of sound is a pivotal moment: all branches of the cinema industries had to come to terms with the innovation of new technologies that would have a fundamental and far-reaching impact. It is also a period that saw heated debate over the politics of Hollywood's influence in Australia, framed by the Royal Commission of 1927 and the New South Wales Inquiry of 1934.

The decision to foreground a study of South Australia's cinema institutions presumes that rather than being a homogenous 'viewing nation' with a unitary national cultural identity in the cinema, Australia can be more accurately characterized as a combination of differentiated regional markets for film distribution, with a diverse range of local businesspeople, showmen and audiences engaged in the cultural practice of putting on, and going to, the movies.[1] While this study will centre on the relations between distribution and exhibition, it provides necessary research into the localism of cinema and, as such, will lay the basis for further work incorporating audience behaviours more centrally. South Australia is a relatively secondary market within Australia, away from the large eastern seaboard cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. At the end of 1928, the state's population was 579, 348, which represented just over 9 per cent of Australia's population (Stonham 1929: 888). South Australia's population was heavily centralized, however, with an estimated 330, 217 living in the capital Adelaide and its suburbs.

Synchronized sound films using the technologies of Western Electric and Fox-Movietone had their commercial premiere in Australia on 29 December 1928 when Warner's *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927) and Fox's *The Red Dance* (Walsh, 1928) were simultaneously premiered in Sydney. South Australia followed just over two months later when the same two films opened at the Wondergraph and Regent cinemas respectively on 2 March 1929. The simultaneous release of these same two films in both cities is indicative not of the dominance of US distribution companies, but rather of the intense competition between these two Australian exhibition circuits which had been so crucial in the 1920s; the simultaneous premieres

1. For an expanded discussion addressing the idea of the 'viewing nation' see Bowles et al. (2007).

were the result of a negotiated settlement between Australia's two major exhibitors, who saw that they needed to avert an expensive battle for exclusive rights to the new technology.

The Wondergraph was a part of Union Theatres, the dominant first-run exhibitor in Australia. It was neither the largest nor the most prestigious cinema Union Theatres controlled in Adelaide, in fact the Australian trade paper *Everyones* described its fall from a previous position of prominence (Anon. 1929a). Union Theatres was not going to tie up one of its most profitable cinemas in an exploratory activity. The Adelaide Regent, on the other hand, was Hoyts' only first-run cinema in Adelaide. It was one of a set of flagship Regent cinemas opened by the Melbourne-based Hoyts circuit as it expanded around Australia's capital cities. For Hoyts, the acquisition of sound was a necessary part of its challenge to the dominance of Union Theatres. At the outset, then, we can see that a history of the international diffusion of this new technology, which had been innovated in the United States, requires an understanding of the local industrial contexts into which it entered, rapidly reconfiguring the relationships within and between the local distribution and exhibition sectors. A first step, then, will be to describe the disposition of these sectors both nationally and locally.

Australian distribution

A database of the films that opened in Australia between the start of July 1928 and the end of June 1929 and were screened in South Australia shows the following range of distributors (with production sources in brackets):

First National (FN, Producers Distributing Corporation, Warner)	88
Paramount (Paramount)	76
Fox (Fox)	69
Universal (Universal)	64
MGM (MGM)	59
Australasian Films (Warner Bros., Columbia and others)	51
J.C. Williamsons (Rayart, Chesterfield)	34
Cinema Art Films (Ufa, British International)	32
British Dominion Films (British Gaumont, Gainsborough)	32
United Artists (independent US producers)	14
RKO	17
Fox Movietone (Fox)	6

While this list gives a broad overview of the main distributors, it does not indicate the changes that took place within that year. J.C. Williamsons and Australasian Films ceased to distribute films at the end of 1928, with RKO, Greater Australasian Films, Fox Movietone and British Dominion Films replacing them in 1929.

These changes to the array of distribution companies stem not so much from sound as from broader changes under way in international

distribution. Warner Bros.' *The Jazz Singer* is famed as the first (partial) talkie of feature length, but it was the first and last sound film to be distributed by Australasian Films, the distribution arm of the famed 'Combine' which had played such a central role in Australian film history to that point (Bertrand and Routt 1989). Douglas Gomery has demonstrated that Warner Bros.' role in the innovation of sound was part of a wider expansion that included the acquisition of First National. One of the attractions of First National was that it provided Warner Bros. with a ready-made international distribution system and Warner Bros. ended its distribution agency with Australasian in January 1929 (Anon. 1929b).

One strength of the Combine when it was established during the first half of the 1910s had been its ability to buy Australian rights to American films from major producers. Australasian had released more films than any other distributor in Australia as recently as 1925, when it enjoyed the local agency for Warner Bros., MGM and Columbia (Anon. 1925). As American companies progressively established their own direct distribution subsidiaries in Australia, the Combine's distribution business had dwindled, so that by the time of sound Australasian Films primarily functioned to distribute Warner and Columbia, along with a handful of films from disparate sources. Warner's withdrawal from its agency agreement with Australasian Films precipitated the latter's withdrawal from distribution altogether so that it could concentrate its capital on expanding its exhibition activities. A new company, Greater Australasian Films was spun off as the local distributor for Columbia.

First National's distribution of Warner was part of a wider reconfiguration of the American film industry. First National had recently lost the Australian rights to Film Booking Office (FBO) films, when FBO became part of RKO, the other studio whose emergence was tied to sound technology. In January 1929, First National began distributing Warner Bros.' new films, while RKO began its own distribution operations in Australia the following month. By the end of 1929 the companies that were to form the basis of the Hollywood studio system in its classical period, had all (with the exception of Columbia) established their own direct distribution in Australia.

While Warner Bros. could start from scratch in negotiating terms for its talkies, Fox, the other company in the first wave of talkies, established a second Australian distribution subsidiary, Fox Movietone, so that its talkies could be sold for higher prices outside of its existing contracts with exhibitors. In 1928 Fox had signed a contract to first-release through Union Theatres for the upcoming year, and the formation of Fox Movietone as a separate entity to extract higher rentals for sound films drew immediate threats of legal action from Union Theatres (Anon. 1928a).

The other international development to impact significantly on Australian film distribution was the rise in British production following the Cinematograph Films Act. Cinema Art Films, which had been a minor distributor with the rights to Ufa's films added British International Pictures to its distribution slate and expanded its operations quite significantly. British Dominion Films, with the rights to British Gaumont and Gainsborough, also developed quite rapidly in 1929. While political agitation for British and Empire films was long-standing in Australia, the rise of these distributors can also be linked to the internal politics of the

Australian cinema industry. When Union Theatres signed first-run agreements with virtually all the leading American distributors in 1928, they forced their rival Hoyts to find alternative sources of popular film (Anon. 1928b). Ernest Turnbull, the head of British Dominion Films, was (like Hoyts) based in Melbourne and had strong ties with that company. The emerging British cinema, which was reaching a point where supply was becoming adequate to satisfy exhibitors' requirements, was a ready-made alternative for exhibitors who were seeking ways to remain competitive with Union Theatres.

Having seen whom the major distributors were, the question of whether they used different strategies in marketing films throughout Australia, and particularly in South Australia, needs to be posed. For most distributors it was standard to import six prints of each film into Australia and they were keen to regularize and maximize first-run release, and then to work prints as hard as possible. If we look first at the end of the silent period, it is clear that different distributors accomplished these tasks in widely divergent ways.

As the large American distributors worked on the basis of selling full programmes, i.e. 52-week blocks, you would expect them to show fairly routine release patterns. Fox and First National seem to have had the most regularized systems with films premiering in Sydney and generally reaching Melbourne five to seven weeks later. Fox and First National films then took a long time to reach South Australia, with many of them opening in Adelaide 15 to 18 weeks after their Sydney premieres. This suggests that these two distributors played each of these states sequentially, putting a relatively large number of prints into a territory and playing it out before moving on to the next one.

Paramount and MGM show a variant of this pattern with their films divided between simultaneous release in Sydney and Melbourne or a two-week gap between these cities. Their films nearly all open in Adelaide six weeks after the Melbourne opening. The strength of this correlation suggests that while Paramount and MGM split their prints between the two largest states and were flexible in slotting films into available theatres in Sydney and Melbourne, prints for South Australia probably came on from Victoria once that state was played out.

Thus far it appears that only subtle differences have emerged between the American distributors, but Universal represents a major departure from the idea that the Americans acted according to a single industrial logic. All of Universal's pictures opened and played out in South Australia before they played either Sydney or Melbourne. Universal's films generally opened in Sydney 14 weeks after their Adelaide opening, and then opened in Melbourne a further two weeks later. The strength of this pattern suggests that Universal was engaged in complementary programming, moving its prints from the smaller states to the eastern seaboard. This arrangement would have to fit in with the requirements of Union Theatres, keeping up a supply of newer films in the smaller state capitals. Although British Dominion Films (BDF) had a much more irregular pattern of distribution it also opened a significant number of its films in Adelaide before Sydney and Melbourne. For Hoyts, BDF fulfilled a similar role of regularizing the supply of new films across different capital cities.

The locally owned distributors, Australasian and J.C. Williamsons, like Universal and British Dominion Films, distributed smaller-scale films. Australasian's strategy was to open films simultaneously in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, while Williamsons typically opened films five weeks earlier in Adelaide than their simultaneous Sydney and Melbourne releases. Because these smaller distributors had to scramble harder to pick up available cinema openings rather than relying on the routines of large-scale block-booking, they routinely pushed single prints of each film across each state. Australasian, which was a vertically integrated distributor, may have released its films in all capitals at once to stabilize the weekly exhibition business of its Union Theatres exhibition arm, which was by far the largest first-run exhibitor throughout Australia's capital cities.

Of course, large-scale 'specials', which were sold outside of programming blocks, were always something of an anomaly. United Artists (which relied on this form of distribution) and isolated MGM films such as *The Student Prince* (Lubitsch, 1927), *The Garden of Allah* (Ingram, 1927), and *Annie Laurie* (Robertson, 1927) all have very drawn-out release patterns as they relied upon the limited availability of long-run cinemas in each capital city.

Thus far I hope to have demonstrated that there were several strategies for marketing films in Australia at this time. If there is one broad generalization that emerges it is a rough division between: (1) the larger of the American subsidiaries who had the advantages of scale and supply that allowed them to establish contracts with first-release exhibitors which regularized distribution patterns; and (2) other smaller-scale distributors who worked around these large contracts in a variety of ways, some of which involved giving greater emphasis to second-tier cities such as Adelaide.

Local exhibition

While distributors and exhibitors often have broadly convergent interests in the cinema industry, it is worthwhile remembering that their relations are also adversarial at a small-scale, day-to-day basis. Trade papers such as *Everyones* are full of complaints about the competitive rivalries between major companies in the same sector, between city and suburban exhibition, and between exhibition and distribution. *Everyones* editor Gayne Dexter gave an indication of the way these tensions were manifested in the exhibition sector:

> First-run rentals don't do much more than cover the Australian overhead expenses, while the suburbs and country pay the foreign remittances [...] In at least three places suburban business is rotten: Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane. The cause is city competition [...] big theatres have created a re-distribution of patronage.
>
> (Dexter 1928)

United Artists' Australasian subsidiary retained 35% of rentals and remitted 65% at this time, so if Dexter's rule-of-thumb calculation is correct, first-run releasing accounted for just over one-third of a film's total rentals. This calculation is at odds with United Artists' initial report on the Australian market at the end of 1922, where Maurice Silverstone claimed that first-run theatres constituted 6% of Australian cinema venues but 20% of a

film's total rentals (Silverstone 1922). First-run releasing had grown more important over the decade as a compressed period when a film earned rentals most intensively, but we need to keep in mind that it also functioned to establish value for subsequent runs, largely in the suburbs, in which the film still made the bulk of its money. However, there was always a shifting balance, and a tension, between city and suburban releasing in terms of issues such as whether extended city runs would exhaust a film's audience, clearance periods between different forms of release and, most commonly, the basis for the division of the box office.

The advent of talkies produced a major reconfiguration of these relations, though in order to understand these changes it is necessary to get a sense of the structure of the local exhibition industry in Adelaide at the end of the silent period. In the Adelaide Central Business District (CBD), there were eight permanent cinemas in 1928, which were classified into three forms of release. Five of these cinemas, all clustered in the same street (Hindley and Rundle Streets are continuations of each other), were devoted to first-run exhibition. These first-release houses each screened a double bill on a weekly change basis beginning on Saturdays. (There were no film screenings in South Australia on Sundays.) This meant that Adelaide needed ten new films each week, or 520 each year, to keep its first-run cinemas supplied. This is roughly consistent with my sample in the preceding section showing 542 films screening throughout the state during twelve months in 1928–29. (Australian Customs figures for 1928 show that 512 films were imported from the United States and 74 from the United Kingdom (Anon. 1929c).)

Adelaide's first-run theatres in 1928–29 were:

- **Wests Olympia**, in Hindley St., capacity 2,500. Ran two sessions every day and accompanied films with stage acts and orchestra. This was the flagship cinema of Union Theatres in Adelaide at this time.
- **York**, at the corner of Gawler Place and Rundle St., capacity 1,800. Ran four sessions on Saturdays and two sessions on other days. Also programmed stage acts.
- **Wondergraph**, Hindley St., capacity 1,500. Ran three sessions every day.
- **Grand**, Rundle St., capacity 1,100. Continuous sessions every day. No live acts. The smallest and least prestigious of Union Theatres' Adelaide cinemas.
- **Regent**, Rundle St., capacity 2,000. Ran two sessions daily with an extra session on Wednesdays. Stage acts and orchestra.

Union Theatres dominated first-run in Adelaide controlling four of the five cinemas. Wests and the Grand were directly operated by Union Theatres, while the York and the Wondergraph were owned by the Wondergraph circuit but operated by Union Theatres. Wondergraph had been the first major circuit in Adelaide, but it divested its suburban circuit earlier in the 1920s, and at the start of 1929 Union Theatres bought out Wondergraph's interest in the York and Wondergraph cinemas in return for Union Theatres shares (Walker 1995: 80; Anon 1929d). The films of

First National, Paramount, Australasian, J.C. Williamsons, Universal and (after December 1929) Fox were contracted to first release in these four cinemas.

The only significant opposition for Union Theatres in controlling first-run exhibition in Adelaide was the Regent, the new flagship of the Melbourne-based Hoyts chain. The Regent was the Adelaide first-release house for Fox (until Fox's deal with Union Theatres, which took effect in December 1929), MGM and British Dominion Films.

Union Theatres also owned the only move-over, second-release house in the CBD:

- **Pavilion**, Rundle St., capacity 1,400. 'The Pav' generally ran the most successful films from Union Theatres' other four cinemas straight after their first-release week. It ran double bills with some films screening for a single night and other bills lasting a full week. It did not present stage acts as part of its programme.

Two other independent CBD theatres operated as third-run, or rather final-run CBD houses, screening double bills for a single night without any live stage presentations. These were:

- **Central**, in Wakefield St., which screened Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays.
- **Empire**, Grote St., screened Mondays, Fridays and Saturday nights with a matinee on Saturday.

Adelaide's suburbs were dominated by two major suburban circuits: the Star circuit owned by Dan Clifford, and the Waterman family's Ozone circuit. At the end of 1928, the two circuits, which all ran double bills, were constituted in the following way:

Star circuit (12 screens)
Screens Saturday (matinee and night) and Wednesday

- Port Adelaide and Semaphore in the port area to the north-west of the city. These two cinemas were strongly paired. They ran the same films, which were 'bicycled' between the cinemas.
- Goodwood and Unley (New) to the south of the CBD. No midweek screening at Unley (New). These two cinemas were also paired but less strongly, often bicycling one film.
- Unley (Old) beside the Star Unley (New). No Saturday matinee; midweek screening on Tuesday, not Wednesday.
- Torrensville to the south-east of the CBD. No midweek screening and no Saturday matinee.
- Norwood and Parkside to the east of the CBD. Some pairing and bicycling of prints.
- Thebarton and Hindmarsh to the west of the CBD. Often paired so that one feature was bicycled.
- Woodville to the west of the CBD.
- Capitol, St Peters to the east of the CBD.

Ozone circuit (7 screens)
Screens Saturday (matinee and night) and Wednesday (night only)

- Port Adelaide and Semaphore to the north-west of the city. As with the Star circuit, these two Ozones were strongly paired sharing the same double bill and also the same live act on Saturday nights.
- Alberton to the north of the CBD.
- Marryatville to the east of the CBD.
- Enfield to the north-west of the CBD.
- Norwood to the east of the CBD. This was the only Ozone not to run a Saturday matinee.
- Prospect, in the inner north of the city.

The Star and Ozone circuits both controlled a number of country cinemas as well. One of the interesting things in charting the locations of these suburban cinemas is that the Ozone and Star circuits seemed to shadow each other in some parts of the city, most noticeably the Port Adelaide/Semaphore port district to the north-west of the city. Both circuits (but most notably the Ozone circuit) would give films their first screening here assuming that this was a part of the city that was more isolated from the CBD than other suburban areas and hence that films would have lost a smaller proportion of their audience during the first-run city season. The close competition between the circuits is also suggested by the way that, after opening the new Unley Star in 1928, Dan Clifford is reputed to have kept operating the old Star in order to deny the rival Ozone circuit the opportunity to take over the cinema. On the other hand, both circuits kept clear of the bayside suburb of Glenelg, where Glenelg Theatres ran both the Glenelg and the Glenelg Strand.

There were also a number of independent suburban cinemas, and screenings were held in occasional venues such as city halls and institute buildings. There was no exclusivity between the Star and Ozone circuits with most films playing on both circuits, though there were significant differences in the ways that films from different distributors interacted with the circuits. Paramount films typically moved straight from the city to play in Star cinemas. Star had Paramount's films for at least a week and generally two weeks before they were available to Ozone cinemas. Universal films played in Star and other independent suburban cinemas, though only very rarely at Ozone cinemas. First National films, on the other hand, typically went from the city to country screenings so that the prints would still be earning during a window period between city and suburban releases. First National films played Ozone cinemas first, typically premiering on the circuit at the Port Adelaide and Semaphore Ozones. The Ozones appear to have had the films exclusively for at least five days before the Star circuit had access to them. MGM's programme films typically played in Ozone cinemas prior to the Star circuit, though often playing at Sam Percival's independent theatres in Glenelg before either circuit. Smaller distributors such as British Dominions Films and J.C. Williamsons did not have extensive suburban bookings but Williamsons films played mainly at Star cinemas, virtually always playing first at the Star Torrensville after city release.

The run-zone clearance system that was central to the marketing of films in the United States during the studio system is well known (Huettig 1976). It will come as no surprise that this formed the basis of release patterns in Australia, though with specific adaptations which distinguished the tactics of different participants in different regions. One of the preconceptions derived from this system is that films would enter South Australia through screenings in CBD theatres and then move through the suburbs to play out over a lengthy period to increasingly distant country cinemas. This is clearly an over-simplification and few films traced such a straightforward path. Where films played in the CBD and had a clearance window before suburban screenings, many went to country centres such as Victor Harbour or Port Pirie so that the prints would be active during this window period. Before even arriving in Adelaide, some films regularly played in country centres such as Mount Gambier, indicating that a print was being shipped from Melbourne or they played at Broken Hill indicating that it was freighted from Sydney. Finally, third-run houses such as the Central and the Empire had their role in the exhibition system playing films when they had been returned to Adelaide after country screenings, so that city audiences had one last chance to see them before the prints were shipped out of the state. The number of city circuit screenings for most films is within quite a restricted range of ten to thirteen screening days. Suburban screenings constitute the largest number of screening days generally outnumbering city ones exactly two to one.

Longitudinal studies of individual titles are quite revealing. *Four Sons* (Ford, 1928), for example, is relatively well known these days due to the reputation of its director, but its movements through the local-release chain and its juxtaposition with other attractions suggests something of the local decision-making processes that shaped the reception of the film in South Australia. It had its first release in Adelaide at the Regent playing for six nights on a double bill with *Chicken a la King* (Lehrman, 1928), another Fox film, as support and a live performance by vaudeville act Wattie and Archie. It moved over to the Pavilion the next week, changing support to *Red Hot Speed* (Henabery, 1929), a Universal film that had topped the bill the previous week at Wests. However, prior to this transition, it screened for a single (Saturday) night at the Ozone in Victor Harbour. Although this was outside the Adelaide metropolitan area, Victor Harbour is a coastal holiday centre which would have been enjoying the peak summer season at the time. At the end of its Pavilion run, there was a window of one week before it opened in the Adelaide suburbs. The country release overlapped with the end of the suburban release (indicating that Fox had two prints in the state for at least part of the release) but then the film had one final third-release city screening at the Central, as a last chance to see the film before the prints left the state.

The arrival of sound

One of the immediate consequences of talkies in Australia was the reinstatement of long-run exhibition in first-run releases. I have tried to show elsewhere that the 1920s can be read as a struggle between distributors and exhibitors over box office share (Walsh 1999: 70). In the earlier years of the 1920s, large-scale 'specials' such as *The Ten Commandments*

(DeMille, 1923), *The Covered Wagon* (Cruze, 1923) and *Ben Hur* (Niblo, 1925) had been the basis for higher distributor rentals. These large spectacle films played for long periods in the first wave of movie palaces, such as the Prince Edward in Sydney and the Capitol in Melbourne, which were built in Australian cities in the mid-1920s. In the later years of the 1920s, long-run films declined in favour of weekly-change programmes augmented by stage presentations. Box office share began to move back towards the exhibitors, who employed musicians and stage acts.

Sound was quickly read as a threat to stage presentation and to the employment of musicians. A rough rule of thumb emerged that the additional money exhibitors spent on equipment and higher distributor rentals could come from decreases in expenses for orchestras and performers. This was an observation quickly borne out in Adelaide when the Regent and York theatres gave notice to their orchestras within weeks of wiring for sound (Anon. 1929e; Anon 1929f).

The Jazz Singer quickly changed the accepted Adelaide pattern of weekly-change programming, moving first-run exhibition decisively back to a long-run basis where a single film would occupy a first-run CBD theatre for several weeks until it fell below an agreed holdover figure. During the late silent era no film had ever played for longer than three weeks in an Adelaide cinema, but *The Jazz Singer* played for six weeks at the Wondergraph, just as it had enjoyed very long runs in other Australian capitals. It was followed by another talkie, *The Terror* (Del Ruth, 1928), which ran for four weeks and then *Interference* (Mendes and Pomeroy, 1928), which also had a four-week run. The long run called into question the equilibrium that had come into being around the supply of new films and the availability of first-run screens. The 14-week span at the Wondergraph of these three films alone meant that that cinema used up three features instead of its normal twenty-eight over that period. As more of Union Theatres' CBD cinemas were wired – the York in June 1929 and the Grand in August – the problem was only exacerbated. As 1929 went on, many silent-programme films opened in the second-run Pavilion or directly in the suburbs.

However Union Theatres' situation was different to that of Hoyts. I have already established that Union Theatres had tried to tie up supply from the major US distributors in 1928, giving it the upper hand over rival Hoyts (Anon. 1928b: 6). Hoyts was given a lifeline by Fox's formation of a separate subsidiary Fox Movietone that contracted to release its sound films through Hoyts. *The Red Dance*, a synchronized film rather than a talkie, ran for only two weeks at the Regent and was followed by a reversion to silent features when *Annie Laurie* ran supported by Movietone sound shorts. Given that Hoyts was reliant on a single source of sound films, the Regent moved back and forth between sound and silent programmes until June when MGM's sound films became available to augment their supplies. With two suppliers both ramping up their supply of sound films, and only one first-release theatre, Hoyts' situation quickly reversed itself and it needed to find another screen, so that in September 1929, the Theatre Royal, a live theatre, was wired as a second-run house for Hoyts to move over sound films after their initial release at the Regent. Union Theatres, with its greater number of theatres

but also its greater number of suppliers, was forced into a similar move when it wired the Grand in August and used it as a second-run house for move-overs.

This indicates the ways that the introduction of sound in Adelaide happened at a very uneven pace. While *The Jazz Singer* and *The Red Dance* were released as spectacles of this new technology, follow-up films were initially slow to follow. *Mother Knows Best* (Blystone, 1928), which had already played in silent form, was released in a synchronized version in Sydney at the end of January, but no new talkies or synchronized films appeared in Australia for a further six weeks. Adelaide saw four sound films in March 1929 but only two in each of the following two months.

Rather than simply acting as a unified force to introduce talkies, different American distributors once again employed different tactics in the way they brought sound films to the Australian market. While Warner Bros. is the studio most associated with the introduction of sound, after *The Jazz Singer* they released only one other sound feature, *The Terror*, in the following six months. This delay may be partly attributable to the changeover in their Australian distribution from Australasian to First National and to the need to negotiate new exhibition contracts for sound films. It is worth noting that *The Terror* played in Adelaide two months before opening in Sydney and Melbourne, a delay explained by the longer hold-over season of *The Jazz Singer* in those cities.

We have seen the reliance of Hoyts on Fox Movietone, which released a steady output of six films in six months. It was Paramount, however, that provided the big fillip to sound-film supplies in Australia as wired outlets began to spread. In the three months between April and June, *Everyones* listed 21 films released in Australia that were all-dialogue, partially dialogue, or synchronized music and effects. Of these, 12 were distributed by Paramount. Characteristically, Paramount signed quickly with Union Theatres to first-release these talkies. In Adelaide they played at the York, which had taken over from the Wondergraph as Union Theatres' primary exhibition venue for talkies. It is worth noting that while Universal only released one sound film in Australia before July 1929, it – also characteristically – played Adelaide well before the eastern states.

Not only was the supply of sound films a factor in the fluctuating number of sound-film releases at this time: after its first wave of installations, Western Electric prioritized the wiring of theatres in the larger and more lucrative areas of the eastern seaboard before the smaller, economically depressed South Australian market. At the end of May 1929, Western Electric was claiming 18 sound installations nationally, with two of these (the Regent and Wondergraph) in South Australia. By the start of August however, Western Electric had wired 74 cinemas nationally but only three in South Australia (Anon. 1929g; Anon. 1929h).

The other imbalance created by the uneven diffusion of sound technologies concerned the always-delicate balance of the relation between city and suburban cinemas. The first Australian suburban cinema was not wired in Sydney until 10 June 1929, a lag of five months after the first city cinema. In Adelaide, the first suburban cinema to show talkies was the Glenelg Strand which was wired at the end of September 1929 – over six months after the first city wirings.

Gayne Dexter's earlier assertion that the cinema business in suburban Adelaide was 'rotten' is one regularly echoed in *Everyones*' weekly regional column. As a state with a small industrial base, South Australia was severely affected by long-running drought that impacted on the state's agricultural production, and a fall in the price of metals that led to a contraction of mining activity. These factors plunged the state into conditions of economic depression from 1927 onwards (Gibbs 1969: 198). More specifically, the Star circuit, the largest in Adelaide's suburbs was already in bad shape. Its expansionary building programme in 1927 left it over-extended when the economic downturn came. It declared losses of £3,384 for the second half of 1928 with its takings declining by almost 10 per cent over the previous year (Anon. 1929i).

Sound unbalanced the nexus between city and suburban release. The pattern whereby city release had introduced films into the market for subsequent exploitation at suburban cinemas was disrupted on two fronts. First, we have seen that long-running meant that city houses ran fewer films, meaning that more films came directly to the suburbs. Suburban exhibitors were unable to piggyback off the advertising and other exploitation associated with first run. Second, and perhaps more importantly, as sound films moved from being a spectacular novelty to becoming an entrenched part of screen culture, it became apparent to audiences that unwired suburban cinemas were offering a vastly inferior attraction. When silent versions of sound films were released in suburban cinemas, it seemed that they lacked precisely the one element that had made them interesting to city audiences.

As suburban cinemas began to contemplate sound installations, Gayne Dexter made a financial analysis of the situation facing exhibitors (Dexter 1929). His article shows that sound films, at least initially, brought with them a reworking of the terms of suburban distribution rentals. Dexter's analysis is built on the observation that distributors, realizing that they controlled a resource that was scarce in relation to demand, had moved to percentage rentals for sound films rather than flat contract fees. He claims that all sound films, regardless of quality, were being rented as specials by the distributors. This meant they were charging percentage rentals of 30 per cent of the box office for a single feature. (Prior to sound, this rate was considered to be the absolute top price only paid for exceptional specials.) Vitaphone and Movietone shorts, generally regarded as necessary for filling out a programme for an audience accustomed to two features and supporting material, incurred an additional charge. An even bigger drawback, however, was that most exhibitors had already contracted supplies of silent films six months in advance. This meant that the exhibitor would have to carry the expenses of the contracted programme that was not screened.

Dexter's conclusion was that suburban exhibitors would be best served by holding back from sound installations until their current silent contracts expired at the end of 1929. He foresaw that in the meantime, the novelty of sound films would also wane leading to a more realistic pricing policy from distributors. Another factor in counselling patience would undoubtedly have been the high initial cost of Western Electric installations and the plethora of cheaper local sound systems that were coming into the market.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that we can do better than simply generalize about Hollywood's activities in Australia. In providing an example of what a fine-grained and intensely local film history might look like in an Australian context, a study such as this draws both on the long-standing tradition of industrial film histories which have become such an important part of American film history, as well as more recent work on local cinema institutions and local audiences. Studies such as this one are beginning to gain strength as film historians seek alternatives to approaches that put all the cards in the hand of the text, and instead begin to seek out real historic participants in the cinema rather than simply subject positions.

This study has tried to show that rather than being a site of victimhood in which Australians were uniformly dominated by American interests acting in concert through local comprador front organizations, there was a more diverse range of participants in distribution and exhibition, pursuing markedly different industrial tactics and enjoying widely varying successes at different moments. While films are very good at crossing borders, we must remember that they meet local contexts once they arrive. The study of the introduction of sound also suggests that rather than simply talking about the impact of new media technologies, we have to read the diffusion and the effects of these technologies through a more complex set of local relations.

References

Anon. (1925), 'The Motion Pictures of 1925', *Everyones*, 16 December, p. 100.

—— (1928a), 'Fox and Union Theatres in Split Over Movietone', *Everyones*, 5 December, p. 8.

—— (1928b), 'First Blood to Union Theatres in Film War with Hoyts', *Everyones*, 18 July, p. 6.

—— (1929a), 'Talkies Start in Adelaide March 2', *Everyones*, 20 February, p. 10.

—— (1929b), 'First National to Distribute Vitaphone and Warners', *Everyones*, 16 January, p. 6.

—— (1929c), 'Last Year's Importations', *Everyones*, 14 August, p. 4.

—— (1929d), 'How Union Theatres Bought Wondergraph in Adelaide', *Everyones*, 23 January, p. 12.

—— (1929e), 'Anzac Day Good for City and Sub. Theatres', *Everyones*, 1 May, p. 35.

—— (1929f), 'UT Will Start on £250,000 Adelaide Atmospheric, Sept.', *Everyones*, 14 August, p. 26.

—— (1929g), '89 Houses Sign for W.E. Sound Equipment', *Everyones*, 29 May, p. 6.

—— (1929h), Western Electric Advertisement, *Everyones*, 7 August, p. 25.

—— (1929i), 'Clifford's S.A. Circuit Loses £3,384 in Six Months', *Everyones*, 8 May, p. 7.

Bertrand, I. and Routt, W. (1989), 'The Big Bad Combine', in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (eds), *The Australian Screen*, Ringwood: Penguin, pp. 3–27.

Bowles, K., Maltby, R., Verhoeven D. and Walsh, M. (2007), 'More Than Ballyhoo? The Importance of Understanding Film Consumption in Australia', *Metro*, 152, pp. 96–101.

Dexter, G. (1928), 'Who's the Boss? Big Circuits, Distributors – or You?', *Everyones*, 1 August, p. 6.

—— (1929), 'What is the Net Profit of Talkies to Suburban Theatres', Everyones, 10 July, p. 6.

Gibbs, R. (1969), *A History of South Australia*, Adelaide: Balara.

Gomery, D. (1976), 'The Coming of Talkies: Invention, Innovation and Diffusion', in T. Balio (ed.), *The American Film Industry*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 192–211.

Hammond, M. (2006), *The Big Show: British Cinema Culture in the Great War 1914–1918*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

Huettig, M. (1976), 'The Motion Picture Industry Today' in T. Balio (ed), *The American Film Industry*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 228–55.

Jancovich, M. (2003), *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, London: British Film Institute.

Silverstone, M. (1922), letter to H. Abrams, 11 July, archival collection held at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research, Madison, Wisconsin, Series 2A, O'Brien Legal Files, Box 55, Folder 9.

Stonham, J. (ed.) (1929), *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 22, Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.

Tulloch, J. (1981), *Legends on the Screen: The Narrative Film in Australia 1919–1929*, Sydney: Currency Press.

—— (1982), *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning*, Sydney: George Allen and Unwin.

Walker, D. (1995), *Adelaide's Silent Nights: A Pictorial History of Adelaide's Picture Theatres During the Silent Era 1896–1929*, Canberra: National Film and Sound Archive.

Waller, G. (1995), *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896–1930*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Walsh, M. (1999), 'The Years of Living Dangerously: Sound Comes to Australia', in D. Verhoeven (ed), *Twin Peeks*: *Australian and New Zealand Feature Films*, Melbourne: Damned Publishing, pp. 69–83.

Suggested citation

Walsh, M. (2007), 'Cinema in a small state: distribution and exhibition in Adelaide at the coming of sound', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 299–313, doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.299/1

Contributor details

Mike Walsh is a senior lecturer in the Screen Studies Department at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia. He is also consultant programmer for the Adelaide Film Festival. He has published numerous articles in various anthologies and journals on film distribution, Australian cinema and Asian cinema. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is currently working on a book dealing with the establishment of United Artists' international distribution network. Contact: Screen Studies Department, Flinders University GPO Box 2100, Adelaide 5001, SA Australia

E-mail: mike.walsh@flinders.edu.au

intellect journals / theatre & music

Journal of **Adaptation in Film and Performance**

Aims and Scope

Adaptation in Film & Performance is a new, peer-reviewed journal designed to engage with specific issues relating to performance on stage, film, television, radio and other media. Embracing comfortably these disciplines under the umbrella of adaptation theories and practices, it attempts to challenge widespread views of national cultural histories and global constructions of performance culture by analysing methods, histories and occurrences of adaptation across a range of media.

Editor: Richard J. Hand, University of Glamorgan / rhand@glam.ac.uk
Editor: Katja Krebs, University of Glamorgan / kkrebs@glam.ac.uk

subscription rates:
£33 personal
£210 instititutional
Postage is free within the UK, £9 in the EU and £12 outside the EU.

Free E-access
Intellect offers free access to all our journals in electronic form to users in institutions where there is a library subscription to the print version of that journal.
online-access@intellectbooks.com

Vol. 1, 2008 / ISSN 1753-6435
£210 / Three issues
Print & full electronic access

To order: Tel: + 44 (0) 117 9589910 / orders@intellectbooks.com

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.315/1

Rethinking distribution: developing the parameters for a micro-analysis of the movement of motion pictures

Ross Thorne *University of Sydney*

Abstract

Although there is a plethora of popular and academic literature on 'cinema' little, if any, explains the day-to-day management of getting films from the distributor to the cinema, from cinema to cinema, and from cinema back to the distributor. The author's discovery of a cache of historic film-hire documents, normally discarded after a couple of years, has thrown light on this aspect of micro-management of film distribution. From some 3,500 documents for the 1950s decade Ross Thorne has produced a database covering about 80 per cent of the films shown at one small-town cinema in New South Wales. Analysis of the database shows how complex cinema management was and how, up until the coming of television, the railways played a crucial role in the organization of the regional entertainment business.

Keywords

film distribution
motion picture exhibition
managing film distribution
transporting films
cinema history

In the late 1980s, when amateur historian Les Tod approached the Australian Film Commission (AFC) about documenting and hopefully saving several picture theatres he was told that such buildings had nothing to do with 'cinema'. Similarly, in 1984 when the NSW Heritage Office made its first vain attempt to list a cinema as an item of state significance (O'Connell 1984), concerted arguments about the 'relevance' of exhibition settings to the cinema in Australia were needed (and in this instance were also unsuccessful). The AFC's response typifies the extent to which dominant understandings of cinema regard the production, distribution and exhibition of films as if they take place in a vacuum. This article, on the other hand, is very specifically concerned with the operations of how particular films came to be screened in particular cinemas. It is interested in the management of the 'nuts and bolts' of distribution – specifically the sending of films to and from individual picture theatres in country towns – and what the data, derived from the records of that management, can tell us.

Generally, there has been little analysis of the correspondence and accounting books of distributors or exhibitors. Part of this lack of investigation is due to the absence of historic records.[1] Such records were rarely archived, usually thrown out when a picture theatre was closed, sold or demolished. Occasionally a day-book record (of films, dates and income) for one or a number of years for a country cinema is found, almost by accident. Julie James Bailey (1998: 49–55), for example, found diaries and ledgers for cinemas at Barcaldine and Mackay, Queensland. Kevin Cork

1. A check with the only remaining distributors identifiable in the Sydney Telephone Directory for 2007, with the same names as in the 1950s – Twentieth Century Fox and Universal – drew the response that they both held no old records and their records had not been forwarded to any state or national library (Thorne 2007a; Thorne 2007b).

(1995: 8) found a complete list of screening dates and admissions for 1938 for the Parkes Picture Palace, not in the town of Parkes but accompanying a Statutory Declaration sent to the theatre and public halls licensing authority. Over a period of fifteen years in the 1970s and 1980s, touring New South Wales as senior survey officer for the national telephone company, Les Tod claims that he inspected 70 to 80 per cent of former cinemas in the state but found little more than the odd roll of tickets and certainly no body of documentation. From his experience, documents were either thrown out when a former owner died, or cleaned out by new owners when converting the building to new uses (Tod 2007).

Notwithstanding the apparent lack of day-to-day documentation of the distribution of films, written works use the term 'distribution' in an idiosyncratic way. An aspect of distribution in accordance with that word's dictionary definition is delivery. Both 'distribute' and 'distribution' are indicated as the *dispersal* of something throughout a region (Brown 1993: 709). However, 'distributor' is noted specifically as an agent who markets goods such as a wholesaler. The film distributor companies conform to this definition, albeit that they act as a distinctive type of commercial lending library – a library that sells, by rental charge, some or all of the products for which it is agent, but unlike other libraries, may request one borrower to pass the product on to another borrower without its prior return to the library.

In film industry parlance the term 'distribution' is commonplace. In the Australian annual trade journal, *Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory*, the summary of the film industry for the year includes a section titled 'distribution'. The editions published through the 1950s have nothing in this section about the actual dispersal of films throughout the suburbs, states or country. They only provide information about a new distribution company, or whether a distribution company has improved its position in the industry and so on.

Similarly, the established literature on Australian cinema that purports to discuss distribution of films contains no information about the physical dispersal or delivery of motion pictures.[2] Even Frank Ricketson's detailed handbook, *The Management of Motion Picture Theatres* (1938), which explains the pricing of film hire, block booking, how to manipulate the booking of films to suit the make-up of an audience, and provides check lists and proforma examples for theatre inspection (Ricketson 1938: 176–85), budgeting (Ricketson 1938: 186–91), auditing and accounting (Ricketson 1938: 192–210) provides no insight into the ease or difficulty of transporting (i.e. distributing) heavy cans of film across a large country such as the United States of America. Douglas Gomery's history of American exhibition (1990) discusses how 'the movie industry elevated popcorn to the status of an important farm crop in the United States' in the late 1930s (Gomery 1990: 62–63), but not the importance of a transport system for shipping films. Although there might be references to such transport in specialized publications, only one was found by this author. It is a short one from Headley (2006: 127): 'At first, local [to Baltimore, Maryland] exhibitors had to go down to the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Railway depot and pick up films shipped from Washington'. Shortly after, film exchanges that contracted to deliver and pick up films were formed in Baltimore as well as other major

2. For example, all of the following use the term 'distribution', but only in terms of the distributor, nothing about 'dispersal' or delivery of films: Tulloch (1982: 57–70); O'Regan (1996: 87); Bertrand and Routt (1989: 13); Collins (1987: 162); MacFarlane, Mayer and Bertrand (1999: 136–41).

cities in the United States of America and Australia. In Australia, with hundreds of picture theatres or cinemas in relatively small towns, the distributing companies in each capital city had to set up a complex management system, that was no doubt time consuming for office staff, to actually get the canisters of inflammable film delivered to medium to small towns as well as relatively isolated hamlets with a one-night-per-week film show. The complexity of the management system is indicated by Peter Broome, who spent over forty years employed from dispatch, through booking and sales before rising to the position of vice president at Twentieth Century Fox (Australia) (Broome 2006a).

What escaped the anonymous employee of the Film Commission, who said that cinema buildings had nothing to do with the cinema, was the somewhat obvious fact that without venues for adequately showing films there was little sense in making films at all. But similarly, without an effective and speedy postal and delivery system for both mail and films, the effect of films as entertainment, education and tacit cultural learning would be severely restricted – possibly limited to major population centres or to the occasional visit by a travelling picture-show man who owned a few films and carried them from town to town (Boyd 2006) in much the same way that the circus and 'live' touring theatre had travelled, at first by horse-drawn wagons (St Leon 1983: 33, 92, 130), then by rail. Sometime after 1909, as the railways were gradually extended in branches from the main lines, one touring theatre entrepreneur, E. I. Cole, devised a system of carriages without wheels that could be moved back and forth from flat-top rail car to flat-top horse-drawn wagon (Garlick 1995: 609–12). By the 1920s the railways had extensive networks in most states of Australia and, for example, Fullers' Theatres would hire special trains to transport cast and technicians (totalling up to 90 for the musical *Rio Rita*), lighting, scenery and costumes. The *Coolamon-Ganmain Farmers' Review* noted, on Friday 29 November 1929 that Fullers' special train, on which was travelling the *Rio Rita* company, was coming from (a performance in) Narrandera, would pass through Coolamon at about midday on Tuesday 4 December on its way to Junee where, in the evening there would be a performance at the recently opened 'Athenium' (sic) Theatre. The next night there was a performance in Young (Anon. 1929), and so it went on.

This was the old-style manner of transporting entertainment – the whole organization moved from town to town. The travelling picture-show man followed this model with his own copies of films, his own equipment, his own transport with his operating equipment and 'box office' at whatever venue he could find. But with the facility of an effective transport system this model could be almost totally dispensed with. Instead, a decentralized, almost grass-roots model became common. Copies of movies would be sent to towns to be shown by locals who staffed the ticket box, ushered patrons to their seats and projected the films. Great reliance had to be placed on both the locals to return or forward the films to another town, and on the mode of transport.

Films were being shown in country towns in relatively permanent, built venues and on a regular basis from around 1910, depending on the town and its size. Junee (New South Wales), for example, with a population of about 2,000, was showing films for a number of days a week in a specific venue by 1912 (Thorne 2006: 9). The films had to be booked

with the distributors in Sydney and then sent to Junee. In the early years of the twentieth century, roads were unsealed and corrugated, and motor vehicles were not particularly reliable. Motor trucks were small, slow and had hard rubber (non-pneumatic) tyres right up to the end of the 1920s and only some main highways were fully sealed before World War II. On the other hand, there was almost an extraordinary system of railways – not necessarily fast, but highly organized and apparently reliable. This was certainly evident in the post-war period. In his memoirs, Peter Broome claims that, as a film salesman in the early 1950s, he could reach any town in New South Wales by rail within 24 hours. 'At this time all branch lines operated [a service] daily' (Broome 2006b: 24).

Uncovering the data

The raw data for this research into the importance of the state railway systems to the movement of films were discovered in dirt-impregnated manila folders in a 30-year disused film rewind room of a former theatre in a country town in New South Wales. Most picture theatres across Australia were closed a few years after the introduction of television to their district. In New South Wales a register of all known picture theatres in the state, and what had happened to them, was compiled during the Centenary of Cinema celebrations (under a National Estate grant). A few of these cinemas remained in use but most were either disused, adapted for some commercial/industrial use or destroyed. Many that had been originally built as community halls were reclaimed for that purpose (Thorne, Cork and Tod 1996). Occasionally, in a disused venue or one adapted for commercial use there appeared little change to the original fabric, as if the exhibitors had simply walked out after the final show.

One such cinema was found by accident in the New South Wales central west town of Canowindra in 1999. It had been the Strand Theatre, built in 1922, and modified in 1935 (Chief Secretary of NSW 1935) to better suit sound reproduction. It closed around the end of 1969 or in 1970.[3] It was then bought by the present owners in 1976 and minimally converted to a carpet and furniture warehouse. The original ticket box had disappeared from its central place in the lobby and the wall between the lobby and the flat-floored auditorium had been removed but the screen and its stage curtain were still in place, and its art deco wall lamps remained unused. Above the lobby, in the projection box, there were two 35mm Australian-made Cummings and Wilson projectors, possibly dating back to 1922, and a 1930s RCA sound system that had been upgraded with the advent of widescreen films. In the adjacent film rewind room there were a couple of boxes in which was considerable correspondence.

A second visit uncovered more documents in dust-encrusted manila folders. Together these documents comprised the film bookings and film despatch instructions for the 1950s and 1960s until the closure of the cinema. The author had not previously heard of any similar 'find'. Since television had come to the region in 1963 it was decided to separate the 1960s documents from those for the 1950s. The 1950s documents might, it was thought, provide a picture from the film titles of the tacit cultural learning from motion pictures before the influence of television (and the later fragmentation of media consumption). The last years of official tax-

3. Older local residents, when interviewed, disagreed on the year (Thorne 1999).

able admissions, 1950–53, (that excluded children's admissions) showed that Australia had a high rate of attendance at picture theatres, around 18 to 20 times per year for each member of the population (for New South Wales attendances, see Cork and Thorne 2006: 64).

Glancing at the documents, while sleeving, it was noticed that films sent to Canowindra seemed to have little or no pattern to where they were being sent after their use, or from where they had arrived before exhibition. The other first impression was how universal was the mode of transport.

There were some 3,500 documents for the decade. In order to organize the information on these thousands of items it was decided to develop a simple database that could be sorted to provide various pictures of the management of distribution of films to the Strand Theatre, Canowindra, which seemed typical of other similar towns in New South Wales (and possibly across Australia). The maximum information contained in any one type of document fell into eleven specific categories or fields for a database (See Table 1). Some documents, such as telegrams, contained only two or three of these categories of information.

Processing the documents

The documents comprised notices of advance bookings of films, dispatch notes and instructions, letters and telegrams. Orders for rolls of tickets, boxes of carbons for the arc lamps, projector spare parts, reports on the

	Field title on database	Information to describe the field title
1	Page number	Of the respective numbered ring binder
2	Date of document	As year, month and day in six digits so they may be sorted sequentially
3	Author of document	Film distributors; occasionally talkie slide contractors, rarely the theatre manager
4	Type of document	Advance list, dispatch instruction, letter, telegram
5	Film title	For features, trailers, shorts, cartoons, serials
6	Type of film	Feature, trailer, short/novelty, cartoon, serial, newsreel
7	Screening date	First day of a two- or three-day run (newsreels listed en masse), entered by year, month and day in six digits.
8	Mode of transport	Rail, passenger/goods, rarely 'transit' (road)
9	Arriving from town	The town, where indicated, is named
10	Sent to town	Named town
11	Length of film	In feet
12	Censorship classification	In the 1950s there were three classifications: general exhibition, not suitable for children, and adult

Table 1: The twelve fields used in the database.

maintenance of the projectors and price lists for consumables were separated from the film hire documents (and entered on a separate smaller database). The advance bookings for feature films usually indicated one title, very occasionally two, only if both were to be on the one programme. Advance bookings for trailers were also for one title. For cartoons, shorts, novelties and featurettes the advance booking slips could contain titles of a few, usually depending upon whether all those titles were being forwarded from Canowindra to one cinema in another town. The advance booking notices for serials (only from Columbia and Universal) could contain anything from one to nine episodes of one title. Newsreel bookings were the only ones that indicated a formal and constant 'circuit' of all editions booked – usually in three- or six-monthly, week-by-week batches – coming from one town, and all being forwarded to one cinema in another town. Each booking notice would list up to 14 or 26 editions for either 14 weeks or 6 months.

The dispatch notes or instructions arrived close to the time of exhibition of a film and were to inform the Canowindra management from what town the film would be arriving, its mode of transport, the screening dates and to where the film had to be sent after its projection. Sometimes this information was the same as that on the advance booking notice but frequently it was not, indicating an amendment to the booking and the exhibition date. Letters sent to the theatre would indicate a new date or tell the management of revised dispatch instructions. Many letters were of a circular nature being duplicated on a Gestetner or similar office duplicator, but addressed and completed on a typewriter. Twentieth Century Fox used the duplicated letter format totally for its dispatch instructions.

As a final, urgent means of communication, telegrams would be sent to the Canowindra Post Office then delivered to the theatre indicating a film's late arrival, non-arrival or a new (and late) dispatch instruction. In the 1950s there could be overnight delivery from Sydney to Canowindra by train. One telegram announced that a feature film was being sent 'today' for exhibition the following night. The film trunk(s) or canister(s) would be delivered from the distributor to Sydney's Central Station goods office, put on a night express to Cowra, transferred to the morning mixed passenger/goods train (or rail motor) to Canowindra, arriving late morning for projection that evening. It was cutting it fine but very rarely, if ever, did a film not arrive, although the Canowindra Strand Theatre projectionist did mark on a couple of documents that a film had been sent in error to one town rather than another. There were also a couple of verbosely written letters seeking explanations for non-arrival of films. But over a ten-year period these were rare.

Without fax and computer facilities and with telephone calls to country towns being expensive and, for many, still through a human operator, communication by post was universal. The mail went to country towns by rail, even to being sorted on special mail sorting carriages (see, for example, the mail car at the Junee Roundhouse rail museum). The distributor would require a good knowledge of the location of towns in the state, the passenger and goods rail timetables, and an 'army' of typists to enter all the information on the booking notices and dispatch instructions (for an indication of this complexity, see Broome 2006).

Like country cinemas in most medium to small towns in New South Wales, the Strand Theatre was independently owned and operated. During the research period it was under a partnership of two accountants whereby documents were not always sent to the theatre, many being posted to the partner who lived in Sydney and, where necessary, forwarded on. Others were sent directly to Canowindra, if thought important for the projectionist. The theatre dealt with nine principal distributors and three small 'independents'. The absence of both invoices from film distributors and records of transport costs indicate that the bookkeeping side of the business was done 'off-site' by one or other of the accountant owners, while only the day-to-day requirements for the head projectionist were passed on to the theatre.

Table 2 shows the counts of the entries in the database for the various types of documents found in the Strand Theatre. The total number of entries provides a gross indication of the percentage of films of all types that came from the respective distributors. All types of documents are also useful in establishing the available film titles in the database. Feature film titles, for example, do not only appear in the advance (booking) list for

Distrib'r	Advance booking lists						Dispatch instruction or note	Letter	Telegram	Totals
	Feature	Trailer	Cartoon	Short	Serial	News				
BEF	280	67		3		10	27	43	18	448
Columbia	151	85	4	12	10		13	83	8	366
Independent Film Dist.	12	4					1	2	1	20
MGM	211	182	85	71		1	41	17	11	619
Paramount	23		64	88			296	4	20	495
Ray Films	4			2						6
Robert Kapferer								1		1
RKO							64	10	2	76
Twentieth Century Fox	362		64	95		22		405	22	970
United Artists	21						40	76	6	143
Universal	170	182		41	10	26	11	121	5	566
Warner Bros	128	76	13	60			259	49	21	606
Totals	1362	596	230	372	20	59	752	811	114	4316

Table 2: Entries (not number of films) in database of the types of documents sent to the Strand Theatre's management by various film distributors, 1950–59.

Note: The database was first sorted for field number 3 and second, for field 4 (See Table 1) to enable the entries of document type by document author (the distributors) to be manually counted.

features, but may be identified from dispatch instructions where no advance lists are available, as for RKO Radio Pictures. From the 64 dispatch entries it was found that at least 24 films and 17 trailers from RKO had been shown at the Canowindra theatre. Twentieth Century Fox had no advance lists of trailers as entries, but this does not mean that there were no Twentieth Century Fox trailers shown. The entries for British Empire Films includes most British-made films from a variety of companies together with some few, mostly B-grade films, from the small US producers, Republic and Monogram.

Although the actual number of films delivered to Canowindra from 1950 to 1959 (inclusive), cannot be summed from the database, a good estimation of the number of films shown and delivered to and from the town – features, trailers, cartoons/shorts, newsreels – can be calculated from the regular format of the cinema's twice-weekly programmes. They were mostly on Tuesday–Wednesday, and Friday–Saturday, with films for this latter programme mostly shown at the Saturday children's matinee (together with the addition of a serial).[4] Very occasionally a major feature film would be shown for three days as, for example, *Tammy* (Pevney, 1957), starring Debbie Reynolds.

Before proceeding to the complexity of calculating the important aspects of what these documents (and the database) communicate today, some preliminary counts were made to confirm that there were sufficient documents in the collection to provide a comprehensive picture of the management of moving films around the state from picture theatre to picture theatre or back to the distributor in Sydney. A count of the individual feature film titles showed that the list evolved covered 80 per cent or more of those possibly projected at the theatre during those ten years. Canowindra audiences had the opportunity of viewing about 200 feature films per year, including some British-made ones. Many more features than this number were made in the United States alone – in excess of 300 per year before television became well established in that country (Jowett 1976: 481), and some 400 feature films were imported into Australia per year.[5] Some 80 per cent of the feature films in the database are listed in *Halliwell's Film Guide* (Walker 1993), which was used as a proxy to indicate that Australians were viewing films of a reasonable 'standard' (since there is a form of a selection process to obtain an entry in *Halliwell's*).

A check of screening dates was made to see what coverage, over the decade, there was in the database of feature film titles. It indicated that 83.7 per cent of scheduled programmes had one or more feature films noted on the database. Annually, they ranged from 61 out of 104 programmes for 1950, to 99 out of 104 for the years 1957 and 1958. This percentage for the complete decade supports the individual feature film count, estimated to be 80 per cent or more of the features shown over the period. From the database it became clear that each film, short, cartoon, trailer and newsreel was sent as a separate entity, and mostly from different distributors. Each programme usually contained two features (a few were one long feature and an additional short or two), a newsreel, two trailers which were both shown at each programme in the week so as to cover all the audience for the following week. This, however, averages one trailer per programme. In addition, there was usually a short or cartoon

4. If a main or support feature for Saturday evening was deemed unsuitable for children an additional film was hired by the theatre for the matinee session.

5. 'The Australian Film Censor, in 1950, stated that 407 feature films were imported into Australia out of a total of 1,405 films on 35mm stock (Alexander 1950).

per programme and a serial for the children's matinee. The average number of films that arrived and were sent on each week was at least 10, mostly 11; at least 520 films per year.

Beyond Canowindra

The Strand Theatre at Canowindra was not unique in the state. There would be other towns that operated a two-programme-per-week cinema, and other smaller towns that presented one programme. *Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory 1951–2* (p. 14) contains a list of country cinemas, claiming the gross figure to be 412. This included open-air venues (often used irregularly) that were not included in a newly compiled list. This new list was checked against the only theatres and public halls licence list available.[6] The third source to check was the *Movie Theatre Heritage Register for New South Wales* (Thorne, Tod and Cork 1997). The final list of regularly used (that is, at least one-programme-per-week) cinemas contained 356 in 290 towns in the state, excluding Newcastle.

Virtually all films, of whatever type, were individually sent by rail. Towns mentioned as to where films were forwarded from Canowindra over the ten years were 71 in number. They ranged from only 1 to 299 entries for films sent to any one town. Of 3903 entries on the database for films being sent from Canowindra, 47.5 per cent were forwarded to other country towns while the remainder (52.5 per cent) are shown as being returned to Sydney. A similar picture occurs with films arriving at Canowindra (except that there was a relatively high number of 965 entries for those coming from the nearby town of Cowra), with 52.1 per cent of entries for films arriving directly from Sydney. Table 3 shows the list of towns from which films arrived and to which films were sent from Canowindra, together with the number of entries per town. Peter Broome advises that from his four decades' experience at Twentieth Century Fox, films travelling from town to town were more than likely block-booked while those coming directly from Sydney and returned to Sydney would be individually booked (Broome 2007).

Table 3 shows some pattern of movement of films between towns. This, according to Broome (2007), indicates block-booking of films. Noteworthy is the high number arriving from Cowra, a town three times the size of Canowindra, then being sent on to Eugowra, Grenfell or Wellington. Grenfell and Junee had an obvious two-way traffic of films into and out of Canowindra. Size of town or location seems to have been only a partial criterion for selection of a route of movement for films. On a population basis, as well as proximity a route seems logical between Cowra (pop. 6,097), Canowindra (pop. 1,913) and Eugowra (pop. 655), all on a branch line starting at Cowra (Figure 1). Grenfell is moderately near Canowindra, even if a slightly larger town, while Wellington is half way between Molong and Dubbo (requiring possibly three changes of train), but with a population of 5,213.

A chronological screening-date sort of the database illustrates (by cinema programme) which feature films were sent and returned directly to Sydney and which films were block-booked (by their being sent from town to town). However no substantial patterns of movement for films in single blocks showed up. Virtually all BEF-released films arrived from and were

6. It was titled 'Theatres and Public Halls', the name of the licensing Act in New South Wales, and published by the Act's administering body, the Chief Secretary's Department, on 22 September 1959 (Kelly 1959). As far as is known the list was neither published in the *NSW Government Gazette*, nor archived at the State Records office. One problem with the licence list is that it includes all buildings that fit specific requirements for the projection of movies – some 673 country venues. They included many halls rarely used for such activity and open-air venues.

Town	From which films arrived	To which films sent	Town	From which films arrived	To which films sent
Adelong	2	0	Hillston	3	1
Ardlethan	1	2	Junee	103	167
Ariah Park	1	1	Kandos	0	2
Barellan	4	8	Koorawatha	1	0
Bathurst	6	4	Lake Cargellico	4	3
Batlow	1	2	Leeton	6	0
Binnaway	2	1	Lidsdale	1	0
Blackheath	0	1	Lithgow	1	0
Blayney	8	10	Lyndhurst	48	64
Bombala	1	1	Manildra	18	32
Boorowa	14	84	Manilla	0	1
Bourke	1	0	Mendoora	2	0
Braidwood	0	1	Merriwagga	0	1
Broken Hill	1	0	Molong	7	15
Bundanoon	0	1	Mudgee	3	0
Canberra	1	1	Narellan	0	1
Captains Flat	1	5	Narrabri	0	2
Carcoar	2	4	Narrandera	9	6
Condobolin	27	10	Narromine	8	13
Coolah	1	0	Nyngan	5	12
Coolamon	2	1	Oberon	55	36
Cooma	0	2	Orange	0	6
Coonamble	6	14	Parkes	0	1
Cootamundra	13	15	Peak Hill	3	0
Coraki	1	0	Picton	0	1
Cowra	965	38	Portland	1	8
Crookwell	1	19	Quandialla	2	0
Culcairn	1	0	Queanbeyan	3	4
Cumnock	0	2	RAAF Forest Hill	4	2
Darlington Point	0	2	Springwood	0	3
Dubbo	0	1	(Sydney)	(1,803)	(2,049)
Dunedoo	3	1	Temora	1	10
Eugowra	24	227	Trangie	1	0
Forbes	9	0	Trundle	1	13
Ganmain	5	1	Tumbarumba	5	0
Gilgandra	3	8	Tumut	13	4

Glen Davis	0	1	Ungarie	0	4
Gooloogong	1	0	Wagga Wagga	3	8
Goulburn	2	0	Warren	3	4
Grenfell	140	272	Wauchope	1	0
Griffith	0	193	Wellington	12	299
Gulgong	3	5	West Wyalong	25	21
Gulargambone	1	0	Woodstock	5	0
Gundagai	8	13	Yass	7	16
Gunning	0	5	Yenda	7	16
Harden	130	86	Yeoval	1	0
Hay	15	30	Young	18	6
Henty	1	0	**TOTAL excluding Sydney**	**1,658**	**1,854**

Table 3: Towns from which, and to which, were sent films to and from Canowindra's Strand Theatre respectively, from 1950 to 1959, with figures as entries in the database. These may include multiple entries due to repetition from different documents (e.g. advance list and dispatch note).

returned to Sydney (that is, not block-booked). Whereas one might expect two feature films from the same block (that is, a four- or three-star together with a two- or one-star-rated production) to be exhibited on the one night, this did not occur. Almost invariably the two features shown were from different distributors. In any one month there would be a mixture of features from about four sources, say, from BEF, Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century Fox and United Artists. Whenever a few entries appeared to show a booking pattern of towns created by one distributor it would change to some other towns. For example, a few Twentieth Century Fox films would come from Cowra and go on to Eugowra, but also come from Cowra and go on to Griffith, when suddenly, in the data, this movement would change to coming from Young and going to Boorowa.

Films that were sent to or came from Sydney required at least one change of trains (at Cowra); those that arrived from or were sent to other country towns, mostly required two, three even four changes of train before arriving at the destination. It is remarkable given the amount of opportunity for human error that very few films were reported as 'not arriving'.

The towns in Table 3 were marked on a map, again to see if any pattern of distribution appeared. The map showed that all distribution of films to and from Canowindra took place on the Sydney-based rail network to the south, the Riverina, central west and far west of the state, outside of the Newcastle, Werris Creek, Walgett and Northern lines (Figure 1). There were few exceptions; one was a trailer requested to be forwarded to Narrabri; a telegram notified the manager of the Strand Theatre that it never arrived.

There were 215 towns on or near railways (or 216 if Newcastle and its suburbs are included). This number of towns had 279 regularly operating

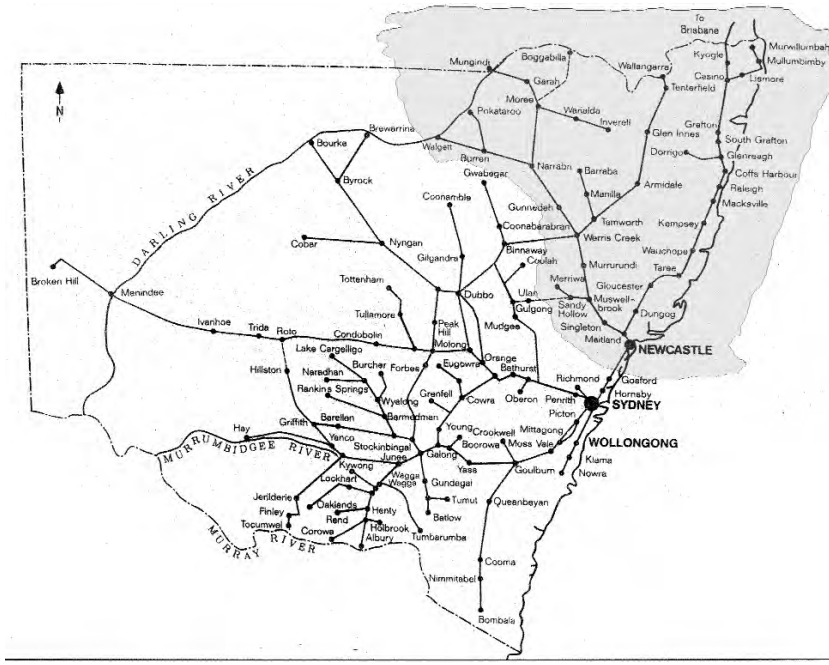


Figure 1: Map of the railways of New South Wales before closures took place from the 1970s. The films that arrived at, and were sent from Canowindra came from, and were sent to towns in the white area of the map.
(Source: RailCorp NSW)

picture theatres on or close to railway lines, or 300 if the city of Newcastle and its then listed suburbs are included. Assuming that the Canowindra theatre was not unique, and indeed was representative of cinemas in country New South Wales, the distribution of films across the state for the 1950s decade (and before) can be estimated. It has already been noted that the Strand Theatre had two programmes per week with at least 10 films (from trailers to features) shown per week. The two programmes covered at least four nights and a Saturday afternoon for a town of 1,913 people (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics 1955–62) in a theatre licensed to seat 600 (Kelly 1959: 10). To calculate the film movements across the state we need to know what the population threshold was for a two-programme week compared to a one-programme week. An assumption was made that, on average, a one-programme town would have a population of less than 1,000 people. These towns (56, with the same number of cinemas) would only have a minimum of five film movements per week. Exceptions included Manildra, with a town population of 787 (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics 1955–62) which had two programmes in its Amusu Theatre, licensed to seat 300 (Kelly 1959: 18) and Culcairn, with a population of 1,093, which had one programme in its School of Arts Memorial Hall cinema, seating 494 (Kelly 1959: 12).

The figures are now 223 cinemas on or near the railway, providing two programmes or 10 film movements per week. These total 2,230 per week (115,960 per year). Those towns with an assumed one programme comprise

280 film movements per week (14,560 per year). The weekly total of separate film movements being trained out of Sydney across the state would be around 2,510. This amounts to 130,520 film movements by rail, per year. If one includes the theatres in Newcastle and its suburbs the figure would rise to about 141,440.

But these figures are for films travelling one way – Sydney to cinema, or from cinema to cinema. Over 50 per cent of those from Canowindra were returned directly to the distributor in Sydney. If this was common for all cinemas in the state there would be another 70,000 or so film movements. Total film rail movements would now be about 211,500 per year in New South Wales. There would have been more if films were sent to the nearest railway station for towns well away from the line. For example, were films sent to Bomaderry-Nowra, at the end of the Illawarra line, for transhipment by road to towns further south such as Moruya, Bermagui, Bateman's Bay, Eden and Bega? If so, the number of film movements by rail would increase. Broome (2007) claims that the films first went to Bomaderry, then by road south. He advised that *all* films were sent by rail from Twentieth Century Fox whether or not a town was actually on a rail line.

As well as highly inflammable cellulose-nitrate film being sent in steel canisters, publicity was also sent weeks before the main features. Parcels of publicity to cinemas on the railway would be about 502 per week or 26,104 per year. A fortnightly parcel of slides and talkie-slide gramophone records would amount to about 5,800 per year if sent in one package. The discs then had to be returned to the advertising agency (e.g. Chas. E. Blanks or Featured Theatre Ads) from the cinemas, thus adding more film-related movements.

So by extrapolation from the data provided in Canowindra we can see that separate film and film-related movements, excluding mail, would amount to around a quarter of a million per year across the NSW country rail system. In addition to this approximate but reasonable number were the regular deliveries of boxes of carbons for the projector arc lamps, orders for tickets and occasional spare parts.

The other aspect of managing the distribution of films from the distributor companies to the country cinemas was the mail (as noted early in this article). It should be remembered that postcodes were not introduced to Australia until July 1967 (Ross 1999: 966), before which date all mail was hand-sorted at local post offices and, for the Sydney central business district, in the basement of the General Post Office. Rail transport of mail was the first option – even in suburban Sydney where a guard of a passenger train or 'Fast Electric Parcels Van' would dump a blue canvas bag of mail onto the station platform. At least 3,000 documents posted by mail would have been sent by rail over the decade. Using the same number of cinemas on or near a railway as in the previous calculations – that is, 223 plus 21 for Newcastle and its suburbs, having two programmes per week, with 56 with one programme per week – conservatively, there would be 300 mail communications per year for two-programme cinemas and 150 for one-programme ones. Based on the number of documents found, and only for cinemas on or close to railways, some 81,600 mail communications, related to the hire of films, would travel by rail each year to country picture theatres. In fact the

number would have been higher but possibly not as high as the number of film movements, since shorts and newsreels, in particular, were in multiples on the one document. Neither mail nor film-related train movements appear in the railway archive statistics.[7]

Conclusion

Apparent from the research in this article is the frustrating lack of detailed records that deal with the mechanism of how films (or indeed many products) were dispersed throughout a large area of the country that comprised New South Wales. In the most general manner cinema research, to date, has discussed the way films were distributed through practices such as block-booking, but not how the patterns of dispersal of films took place in order to achieve efficient (for the distributor) block-booking. An extended analysis and discourse on the way the actual dispersal of films took place – by the railways – is still wanting.

The article raises questions about the disappearance of records, even perhaps the omission of retaining, or inability to retain records. The State Government Railways Department did not archive statistical returns prior to 1963, yet one assumes that governments will archive their activities for future generations to research for a historical picture of the state and the nation. Film distributors have no historical records, nor have they donated records to a state or national library. And although people will glibly say that 'there must be plenty of old picture theatres "out there"', which can either be used again as cinemas, or in which fifty-year-old records may lie, there are not. A perusal of the 2,000 names of premises used for regular exhibition of films in New South Wales from 1896 to 1996, and their state of condition in 1996 will show the researcher how many have been demolished or adapted (see Thorne, Tod and Cork 1996).

A list of country cinema venues that existed in 1950 was compiled for the Heritage Office of New South Wales in 2003 to show the rarity of the building type before the advent of the multiplex cinema. Once those demolished, most severely adapted, and which had been community halls returned to that function, were subtracted, there remained between 12 and 18 premises, or 4 per cent of the total number that were either still being used for exhibition of films, closed or moderately adapted, and suitable for restoration.[8] Premises that had reverted to being community halls have long since been cleaned out, painted and upgraded for modern use.

It is contended that the day-to-day film hire documents found at the former cinema at Canowindra is a rare discovery. They are informative for the film titles shown, the number of titles hired from nine major distributors from 1950 to 1959, the methods of both advance booking and instructing the cinema on the dispatch of films to other towns. The only distributor to show the cost of hire of its titles on the booking slips was Universal Pictures. Most importantly the documents illustrate how the dispersal or delivery aspect of distribution took place before the decline of cinemas (due to the diffusion of television across Australia), and the decimation of the railway system.

On the question of block-booking and whether patterns of movement of feature films can be established across the state, there may be insufficient dispatch notices to enable plotting such movement. It should be remem-

7. The earliest NSW Railways, Traffic Branch Statistical Statements are for 1963. The breakdown of goods carried are for commodities such as coal, steel, timber, flour, wheat, perishables and 'general'. General goods comprised some 20,000 wagons out of a total of 110,000 wagons loaded for the month of April 1963. Film canisters or trunks and parcels would be included under 'general goods' (NSW Government Railways 1963–66).

8. The list was compiled as part of an Interim Report to the Heritage Office of New South Wales by the author as part of preliminary work on Thorne (2003).

bered that although some 80 per cent of feature film titles were found for the decade, they were drawn from a combination of advance booking slips and dispatch instruction notices. The towns mentioned on the advance booking slips were rarely the towns finally organized and mentioned on the dispatch notices. The latter were the more accurate, the documents usually arriving at the cinema one or two weeks before the exhibition date. But the collection of dispatch notices is incomplete.

In many ways, apart from the film salesmen, the bookers and dispatch personnel at the distributors, the unsung hero of distribution was the railway system. It was ubiquitous. A service so omnipresent is often overlooked for its importance to the fabric of society at its time of operation. If little else in the way of positive outcomes, this article has demonstrated how important the railway system was, how many films and how much film-related material would have been moved around the state of New South Wales – some quarter of a million per year. It should not be overlooked that the movement of films, etc. was one small part of the 200,000 railway wagons carrying 'general goods' out of some 1.3 million wagons per year loaded with commodities and goods across the state.

As a corollary to the fact that the same films – as mass entertainment – covered the state from villages of 400 people to large provincial cities, together with the fact that there was a high rate of attendance at cinemas, it can be stated that cultural learning from motion pictures was relatively homogeneous and ecumenical. This was, of course, achieved during the first half of the twentieth century through having a wide coverage across the state of an effective transport system – the railways.

Acknowledgments

The 31 ring binders in which are the documents from the Strand Theatre, Canowindra, plus a copy of the database on a CD-ROM, have been deposited at the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra. The author thanks the referees for their helpful comments, which enabled revisions to the original article.

References

Alexander, J.O. (1950), 'The Chief Commonwealth Film Censor's Official 1950 Report', *Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory, 1951–2*, pp. 58–59.

Anon. (1929), *The Daily Witness*, Young, Wednesday, 27 November, n.p.

Bailey, J. J. (1998), 'Independent Exhibition in Country Queensland from the 1930s to 1960s', in J. Doyle, B. van der Heide and S. Cowan (eds), *Our Selection On: Writing on Cinemas' Histories*, Canberra: National Film and Sound Archive/Australian Defence Force Academy, pp. 43–60.

Bertrand, I. and Routt, W.D. (1989), 'The Big Bad Combine', in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (eds), *The Australian Screen*, Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, pp. 3–27.

Boyd, M. (2006), 'Travelling Picture Show-man, Stan Boyd' (edited from a transcribed oral history tape recorded by M. Boyd), *People and Physical Environment Research*, 58–60, pp. 155–58.

Broome, P. (2006a), 'Memoirs of a Film Distributor: Part One', *CinemaRecord*, 51: 2, pp. 10–12.

—— (2006b), 'Memoirs of a Film Distributor: Part Two', *CinemaRecord*, 52: 3, pp. 24–29.

—— (2007), personal communication with the author, 14 May.

Brown, L. (ed.) (1993), *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 709.

Chief Secretary of NSW (1935), 'Report by Police Sergeant at Canowindra, dated 26 September', Kingswood: State Records (NSW) Series 15318, Container 17/3392, Item 2295.

Collins, D. (1987), *Hollywood Down Under: Australians at the Movies: 1896 to the Present Day*, North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson.

Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (1955–62), *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1954*, Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.

Cork, K. J. (1995), 'Cinema as "Place": The Case of the Picture Theatres in a Group of Towns and Villages in the Central West of New South Wales', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 49, pp. 8–18.

Cork, K. and Thorne, R. (2006), 'The Social Significance of the Picture Theatre. How Many People Did Attend Picture Theatres in New South Wales before Television and Video?' *People and Physical Environment Research*, 58–60, pp. 48–67.

Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory, 1951–2, (n.d.), Sydney: Film Weekly Pty Ltd, p.14.

Garlick, B. (1995), 'Touring', in P. Parsons with V. Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Sydney/Cambridge, UK: Currency/Cambridge University Press, pp. 609–12.

Gomery, D. (1990), 'The Theater: If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall', in M.C. Miller (ed.), *Seeing Through the Movies*, New York: Pantheon, pp. 49–80.

Headley, R.K. (2006), *Motion Picture Exhibition in Baltimore: An Illustrated History and Directory of Theaters, 1895–2004*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Jowett, G. (1976), *Film: The Democratic Art: A Social History of American Film*, Boston: Little Brown and Company.

Kelly, C.A. (1959), *Theatres and Public Halls*, Sydney: Chief Secretary's Department, 22 September.

MacFarlane, B., Mayer, G., and Bertrand, I. (1999), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

NSW Government Railways (1963–66), 'Railways Commissioner NSW, Traffic Branch Statistical Return', unpublished report, State Records (NSW), Kingswood, Series NRS 15285, Container 1, Item [01].

O'Connell, C. (1984), *Report to the Minister for Planning and Environment: An Inquiry pursuant to Section 41 of the Heritage Act, 1977, into objections to the making of a Permanent Conservation Order in respect of the building known as the Odeon Theatre, East Esplanade, Manly*, Sydney: Office of the Commissioners of Inquiry [for NSW], November.

O'Regan, T. (1996), *Australian National Cinema*, London: Routledge.

Pevney, J. (1957), *Tammy [and the Bachelor]*, USA: Universal-International.

Ricketson, F.H., Jr. (1938), *The Management of Motion Picture Theatres*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ross, J. (ed.) (1999), *Chronicle of the 20th Century*, Ringwood: Viking.

St Leon, M. (1983), *Spangles and Sawdust: The Circus in Australia*, Melbourne: Greenhouse.

Thorne, R. (1999), Recorded oral histories of five elderly residents of Canowindra (born 1920 to 1939) including a former half-share owner, and part-time assistant projectionist, 15 and 17 August; on two CD discs deposited in the

local Cabonne Shire Library and the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

—— (2003), 'Heritage Assessment of the JADDA Centre formerly known as the Athenium (*sic*) Theatre, Junee, NSW for the NSW Heritage Office', unpublished report, 14 September.

—— (2006), 'A Study of the Type of Historical Research needed to Establish Heritage Significance: The Case of Early Theatre and Cinema in Junee, New South Wales', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 58–60, pp. 5–23.

—— (2007a), Twentieth Century Fox Film Distributors, Moore Park (Sydney), personal communication with the author, 1 May.

—— (2007b), Universal Pictures Australasia Pty Ltd, Milsons Point (Sydney), personal communication with the author, 1 May.

Thorne, R., Tod, L. and Cork, K. (1996), *Movie Theatre Heritage Register for New South Wales, 1896–1996*, Sydney: Department of Architecture, University of Sydney.

Tod, L. (2007), personal communication with the author, 22 May.

Tulloch, J. (1982), *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Walker, J. (ed.) (1993), *Halliwell's Film Guide*, 9th edn., London: Harper Collins.

Suggested citation

Throne, R. (2007), 'Rethinking distribution: developing the parameters for a micro-analysis of the movement of motion pictures', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 315–331. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.315/1

Contributor details

Ross Thorne was trained, and practised as an architect and acoustic consultant until 1980. In 1961 he became a lecturer in architecture at the University of Sydney, continuing through as an associate professor (1973) until retirement (1998). He researched office buildings, housing and recreation facilities but theatre and cinema have been of constant interest since 1963. This interest quickly developed beyond theatre buildings to the social history of theatres and cinemas in Australia. Publications since 1971 include books and articles in both popular and academic journals, together with a number of assessments commissioned by state and federal heritage authorities. Contact: Honorary Associate, Department of Performance Studies, School of Letters, Arts and Media, University of Sydney, Woolley Building A20, University of Sydney NSW 2006, Australia.
E-mail: rthorne@tpg.com.au

intellect journals / theatre & music

Journal of
Music, Technology & Education

ISSN 1752-7066

Aims and Scope

Journal of Music, Technology and Education is the only journal specifically dedicated to the educational aspects of music technology and the technological aspects of music. Peer-reviewed with an international editorial board, JMTE aims to draw its contributions from a broad community of educators, researchers and practitioners who are working closely with new technologies in the fields of music education and music technology education.

Editors
David Collins
Doncaster College
David.collins@don.ac.uk

Subscribing
JMTE is published three times per year. Contact us for a subscription order form: Intellect, Sales, The Mill, Parnall Rd, Bristol BS16 3JG, UK.

Current subscription rates: £33 (personal) / £210 (instititutional) (Postage is free within the UK, £9 in the EU and £12 outside the EU.)

Free E-access
Intellect offers free access to all our journals in electronic form to users in institutions where there is a library subscription to the print version of that journal.

Advertising Enquiries
and bookings should be addressed to: Intellect, Journals Marketing, The Mill, Parnall Rd, Bristol BS16 3JG, UK.

Volume 1, 2008
£210 / Three issues
Print & full electronic access

Tel: +44 (0)117 9589910 / orders@intellectbooks.com / www.intellectbooks.com

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.333/1

Exploiting the regional Queensland audience: Birch Carroll and Coyle's Wintergarden theatres, 1925–35

Denis Cryle *Central Queensland University*

Grace Johansen *Central Queensland University*

Abstract

The authors examine the first decade of the Birch Carroll and Coyle consortium, focusing on its regional Wintergarden theatre chain and on its stated objective of bringing metropolitan sophistication to regional centres, in a period of industry optimism which coincided with the construction of its Wintergarden theatres throughout Queensland. The article draws on local print sources and interview material in order to explain and confirm the social appeal of cinema-going across a range of regional sites. The exploitation campaigns organized and coordinated by Birch Carroll and Coyle's regional and state managers in the midst of moral opposition, government regulation and press criticism, both before and after the advent of the talkies, is examined. Drawing extensively from industry journals of the period, the authors argue that press publicity, along with local stunts and staged events, formed an integral part of Birch Carroll and Coyle's concerted strategy to sell its Hollywood product and offset ongoing criticism within government and local communities. In conclusion, they examine the impact of the Depression on the industry in Queensland, including regional audiences, and assess its impact on Birch Carroll and Coyle's subsequent regional theatre publicity campaigns.

Keywords

Birch Carroll and Coyle
audience
rural
cinema-going
Queensland
exhibition
film publicity

In this article, we examine the first decade of the Birch Carroll and Coyle (BC&C) consortium focusing on its regional Wintergarden theatre chain and on its stated objective of bringing metropolitan sophistication to regional centres. The decade in question, 1925–35, coincided with a period of optimism during which Wintergarden theatres were constructed throughout regional Queensland. Drawing extensively from industry journals of the period, we argue that press publicity, along with local stunts and staged events, formed an integral part of BC&C's concerted strategy to sell Hollywood films to regional audiences and offset ongoing criticism about their economic and moral impact within government and local communities. This upsurge in exploitation and engagement with the press represented a sustained attempt to attract a wider audience to cinema, both in its city theatres and in regional locations.

The latter years of the decade under examination brought a succession of challenges to the industry at a time of dwindling audiences, renewed moral opposition and government regulation. In particular, this article

examines the effects of the Depression on the Queensland industry and assesses its impact on BC&C's performance and ongoing publicity on behalf of its regional theatres. As well as identifying the roles of key executives like Bill Winterflood and Keith Jeffries, the article looks at the competing campaigns organized by regional managers and at state-wide coordination across the circuit, both before and after the advent of the talkies. Using company records and interviews as well as Queensland print sources of the period, it analyses the consortium's adoption of the talkies ahead of its local rivals and its changing audience strategies during the downturn.

Cultural historians Richard Waterhouse (1990: 132) and Diane Collins (1987: 103) point out that, for over four decades, going to the movies meant a combination of film and live variety. Although film was widely accepted as a form of regional entertainment by the 1920s, early moviegoers were, for the most part, of working-class background, in keeping with traditional audiences for vaudeville and circus. In an earlier essay (Cryle and Johansen 2007), we have shown how George Birch, a film exhibitor and E.J. Carroll, a well-known entrepreneur, film producer and exhibitor, joined forces to present film entertainment to regional centres in Queensland, Australia. They also demonstrate how, after enjoying early success exhibiting Australian films like *Ned Kelly*, Birch Carroll, as it was then called, chose to maintain its tradition of mixing silent films with vaudeville. 'Carroll's Continentals', for example, which began in the Ipswich town hall as early as 1909, exhibited Limelight production films interspersed with live acts (Cryle and Johansen 2006). This article will demonstrate that, with the subsequent formation of the Birch Carroll and Coyle Wintergarden theatres, audience development strategies shifted between on the one hand, an aspiring middle-class patronage, with expectations of more sophisticated venues and films, and on the other, a populist approach under the pressures of Hollywood and harder times.

In the early 1920s, Queensland, situated on the north-eastern sea board of Australia, was truly isolated by the tyranny of distance from the capital of Brisbane and the more populated southern centres. Not only would BC&C's Wintergarden chain fulfil the consortium's aim of supplying suitable venues for high-class entertainment to regional centres such as Townsville, Rockhampton, Bundaberg and Maryborough, but it would pride itself on establishing a social and cultural resource for local residents. Birch and Carroll had begun their pre-war partnership by leasing regional Queensland venues, often with unsatisfactory results. Because commodious public halls were in regular demand for community activities, local arrangements would sometimes take precedence over film bookings, forcing exhibitors to alter their own arrangements at the risk of financial loss (Anon. 1932b: 3). Having taken Virgil Coyle, a member of an established business family's north Queensland theatres, into the existing partnership in the mid-1920s, the new consortium set out to surmount this difficulty by purchasing city land where possible rather than leasing its venues, and then building their own new Wintergarden theatres. The unprecedented size and luxury of these new venues, featuring carpeted vestibules, dress circles and special balconies, constituted a new phase in cinema-going for regional Queenslanders. The availability

of regional capital investment, in the form of local shareholdings, encouraged the new company to embark on its building programme as part of an ambitious strategy to lure new audiences to cinema. While the construction of picture palaces was a feature of the metropolitan industry, Birch Carroll and Coyle extended this concept beyond their capital city palaces in Sydney and Brisbane, using the same design and architect as that employed for their acclaimed Brisbane Wintergarden.

By the 1920s, the industry, still in expansionist phase, was increasingly conscious of its public image. As early as 1921, one member of the Federated Picture Showmen's Association regretted that patrons believed picture theatres to be a 'cheap class of entertainment' and lowered their public standing (Soden 1921: 11). If Brisbane exhibitors operated 'flea pits' in the early years of the industry, regional venues were little better (Scales 1936: 6). Harry Scales, a former BC&C theatre manager at Townsville, later recalled the difficult conditions under which regional venues operated:

> Exhibitors in the southern part of Australia have little idea of the conditions showmen work under in the north of Queensland during the months of January, February and March – the midsummer and the rainy season. The humidity is terrible and, at any moment, a deluge comes down unexpectedly filling creeks, washing away bridges and keeping intending patrons from shows.
>
> (Scales 1936: 6)

One associated difficulty lay in keeping theatres clean since patrons, often barefoot, appeared oblivious to the monsoon conditions.

Because most early venues were open air, Birch Carroll and Coyle undertook to enclose and upgrade large venues like the Earls Court at Rockhampton. Hal Andrews, an early Queensland itinerant exhibitor who had purchased the open-air Rockhampton Olympia theatre, recalled a business setback when, during a 'period of disastrous weather', it rained incessantly for 31 days and nights:

> With an open-air show we could do nothing. I then sold out to Birch and Carroll. Really they could have had the show for nothing. But they treated me handsomely [...] [paying off] everything that was owing on the show and [keeping] me going personally for at least three months.
>
> (Andrews 1937: 62)

In contrast, the 'Tropical Theatre Concept' associated with the Wintergardens was designed to combat these summer conditions, with improved ventilation, appropriate yet comfortable seating and the use of interior fern gardens as part of the Wintergarden theme. These marked improvements confirm Collins's assertion about an increasing awareness on the part of exhibitors that their venues formed an integral aspect of the cinema-going experience and that, in order to maximize attendance from a cross-section of the community, 'different prices could be charged for varying degrees of comfort and elegance' (Collins 1987: 135–36).

The regional Wintergardens, closely modelled on the Brisbane Wintergarden and the new city picture palaces, were modified only in certain

particulars. Apart from their more pragmatic seating arrangements using slatted timber, the facades of the Ipswich and Rockhampton theatres made provision for shopfronts in the manner of their Brisbane counterpart, a commercial arrangement that was not however acted upon (Boyle et al. 2001: 35). Instead, the company preferred to use window frontages, along with vestibules, for its own marketing campaigns. In other respects – their scale, lighting, stage and personnel – the similarities with the Brisbane Wintergarden were striking. Well-groomed and trained usherettes were equally a feature of BC&C's regional operations. As in city theatres, their usherettes went through a strict rehearsal every fortnight to ensure that each was 'seat perfect' when the lights were on or off. The company also issued them with a book of instructions with such tips as: 'Don't come on duty unless every item of dress is correct. Don't forget to say "sir", "madam" and "thank you" (Gayle 1927: 5).

In regional centres like Bundaberg where BC&C had acquired two theatres, usherettes worked both the Wintergarden and the Olympia. Just as regional managers competed with one another for audiences, so their usherettes were in competition with each other to have the most stylish blouse (Cunningham 2003). If regional managers competed with each other across Queensland, using exploitation methods ranging from posters, advertisements and street theatre, so their usherettes were in competition and on show to the public. In the 1920s and 1930s, Rockhampton employees were 'garbed in a smart and effective uniform of cerise velvet, with grey cuffs and Medici collars, grey shoes and stockings' in keeping with the

Figure 1: Bundaberg Wintergarden Theatre interior showing tropical theatre seating and stage

(Sources: Birch Carroll and Coyle)

attractive décor of the theatre itself (Boyle et al. 2001: app. 4). Interviewees regarded it as an honour to be employed by the company and were expected to adjust push-down seats for patrons as part of the 'royal treatment' the Wintergardens lavished on patrons (Gerard 2003). During the 1920s, most silent-movie venues employed a pianist for live accompaniment. By contrast, the regional Wintergardens boasted their own orchestras, often of high standard, as part of an ongoing commitment to variety and film. Although pianos gave way to more grandiose organ recitals at the Brisbane Wintergarden, the regional theatres did not follow suit, retaining orchestras and pianos for exhibition purposes.

With large Wintergarden neon signs dominating regional skyscapes, regular cinema-going came to assume a sense of ritual and social ceremony associated with church attendance (Baxter 1986: 10, quoted in Tomsic 2004: 06-3). Regional Queensland interviewees also spoke of regular Saturday-night bookings at the Wintergarden. Although cinema-going remained a relatively egalitarian social pastime, the décor and architecture of Wintergardens made cinema more attractive to middle-class patrons, many of whom preferred to book seats in advance and occupy the more expensive dress circle. A Bundaberg interviewee, recalling her fondness for balcony seats, remarked that this family practice continued from an early age, and added that 'you could have imagined royalty when we sat there in the early days in the boxes at the sides of the balcony' (Tomsic 2004: 06-3). The atmosphere of fantasy and romance, associated with cinema-going was linked in some cases to new social practices such as dating, controversial in regional areas where distance often posed obstacles to socializing and the activities of young females were usually segregated or severely curtailed (Tomsic 2004: 06-5). In spite of the intense Queensland summers, the attire of Wintergarden staffs and their well-kept theatres imposed improved dress codes on their patrons, offering women in particular new opportunities for the 'performance of femininity' (Tomsic 2004: 06-9). Like church attendance, cinema-going offered a 'wedge against isolation' in which the social aspirations of the audience were reinforced by the glamour and new sexual freedoms emanating from Hollywood.

Despite the prospect of superior venues, admission had been a sensitive issue for regional Queensland audiences. In August 1925, during evidence at the Commonwealth Tariff Board hearings, Brisbane Wintergarden manager, Edward Purves, recalled a costly strike in 1921, precipitated when Birch and Carroll attempted to increase admission prices from 6d to 9d at its Townsville and Rockhampton theatres: 'They were promptly declared black. The companies lost something in the vicinity of £20,000 fighting that strike. People did not dare to go into those theatres' (Anon. 1934b: 16).

Birch and Carroll, then in local competition with Coyle, held out against union pressure in Townsville, amid demands for a wage flow on to their employees. Paramount, their main American supplier, was also caught up in the strike when maritime unions threatened to impose a ban on the movement of cinema supplies and personnel (Anon. 1925a: 4). Consequently, the newly formed Birch Carroll and Coyle consortium, along with other regional Queensland exhibitors, remained cautious about admission increases until the Earle Page government removed the long-standing entertainment tax on admissions under 2s 6d in the mid 1920s (Anon. 1925b: 6).

In the wake of its earlier industrial difficulties, BC&C practised a policy of local paternalism towards employees through its regional managers. It was however, prepared to resist ambit wage claims by theatrical, electrical and miscellaneous workers unions. The company exercised considerable influence over industry matters, including pricing, through the Queensland Picture Showmen's Association, a broad-based organization which, by 1926, had attracted a substantial membership. In the mid-1920s, the Association vigorously lobbied the federal government for the removal of the entertainment tax and used the threat of non-distribution as a weapon against local price-cutting:

> The prices of admission to picture shows throughout the state have been registered in this office by the various showmen, and any new men starting must conform to the prices prevailing in that particular locality, as should he attempt to undercut the registered prices, he will very soon find himself without a film supply.
>
> (Anon. 1926d: 33)

This was important in regional circuits like BC&C's, where the company sought to offer a range of seating options to patrons, starting from 1s 6d to 2s admission for stalls at ground level and extending to 2s 5d and 3s 3d for centre stalls and dress circle tickets respectively (*Queensland Times* 1929: 9). An important long-term player, who would remain general manager of Birch Carroll and Coyle for many years, was 'Big' Bill Winterflood. A tireless traveller throughout the Queensland circuit, and a renowned negotiator, Winterflood oversaw both film distribution and industrial policy throughout the critical 1920s and 1930s. One anecdote about Winterflood's 'hands-on' approach relates to the construction of the Ipswich Wintergarden in the late 1920s. After a series of frustrating construction delays, Winterflood was reputed to have 'hired a pair of bowyangs' and 'tore in with the bricklayer's labourer', doing his best to '[liven] things up in a practical fashion' (Anon. 1927d: 3).

Along with union demands and undercutting from smaller regional exhibitors, BC&C faced other problems attracting middle-class patronage during the 1920s. Not the least of these were regular denunciations of Hollywood by the press, pulpit and educators for degrading moral standards and corrupting Australian youth (Watson and Watson 2003). Newspapers opened their columns to middle-class correspondents and moral crusaders including schoolteachers and members of the clergy (Anon. 1928c: 3). More specifically, these complaints, which received close press attention during its coverage of the 1927 Industry Royal Commission, included the lack of segregation of youth at venues, and renewed calls for the supervision of young cinema-goers (Tomsic 2004: 06-6; Collins 1987: 184–89). In part, this reflected ongoing concerns with the low status of early audiences, the inadequacy of many venues and general dissatisfaction with working-class larrikinism and social behaviour.

Despite vehement opposition, not all middle-class critics of American films were opposed to cinema-goers. Many were Anglophiles who concurred with the *London Times* when it opined that 'American films were so

prevalent in Australian cinema that British films could not even find playing dates in the country' (quoted in Glaney 2005). It was not difficult to convince politicians and patriots that the industry's difficulties emanated primarily from American domination. Running parallel with the moral debate about the effects of cinema at the time of the 1927 Royal Commission was an economic debate about the need for quotas for Australian and British films to combat the box office supremacy of Hollywood. In evidence to the Commission, BC&C executives like Winterflood stated that 'when they got good Australian and British films, they were only too anxious to show them' (Anon. 1928e: 9). Dan Carroll, who had previously been involved with his brother 'E.J.' Carroll in early Australian film production, was in favour of short-term quotas (3–5 years) for Australian films, but not for British films. Based on his own early production experience, Carroll considered the British industry problem to be one of organization and marketing rather than quality, while the Australian industry suffered by virtue of its small domestic market (Anon. 1931b: 14). Having previously lost heavily in their own production ventures and alert to the decline of local industry, the Carrolls continued to look to the American film industry as a source of future profitability.

By the mid-1920s, the Carrolls had not only established a regional Queensland exhibition circuit extending beyond southern Queensland to include Rockhampton, Townsville and Ayr in north Queensland, they had purchased a stake in Australasian Films as its Queensland representatives. Through Australasian Films, Birch Carroll and Coyle became allied to Union Theatres, a Sydney-based film distribution and exhibition company managed by Stuart Doyle. The Union Theatres chain promoted itself as the largest theatre circuit in the country, with high-class theatres like St James in Sydney and the Princess in Melbourne, extending beyond Brisbane to regional Queensland association with the Carrolls. If BC&C drew encouragement from the new cinema audiences patronizing their Sydney and Brisbane theatres, they were well aware of peculiar challenges in regional Queensland, where public scepticism among the press and clergy was reinforced by regional conservatism in matters of entertainment. A powerful ally of BC&C and defender of the picture industry, subsequently to become a 50 per cent shareholder was Stuart Doyle (Anon. 1937b: 4). As early as 1924, Doyle, then director of Union Theatres, admonished critics in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* for the 'tremendous amount of misrepresentation about the industry by "would be censors"' (Doyle 1924: 18). Along with the Carrolls, Doyle defended the industry against both its nationalist and imperial critics at the time of the Royal Commission. By 1927, a pragmatic consensus emerged among BC&C executives that, in order to capture a middle-class audience, its future lay in the exhibition of Hollywood films, in alliance with large American distributors like Paramount. Dan Carroll, with mixed experience of Australian productions attributed this trend to the fact that films like *The Sentimental Bloke* (Longford, 1919) and *Ginger Mick* (Longford, 1920) were considered 'of very low grade', with the result that Australian pictures had become 'a subject of ridicule among local audiences'. While less scathing about British films, Carroll went on to explain the American stranglehold by reason of 'the clear field she had to develop the industry during the war' (Anon. 1927c: 6).

In the increasingly volatile social and economic order of the late 1920s, however, such a film commitment to Hollywood was not without risks. To fill its commodious regional Queensland theatres, with a combined local capacity unprecedented to that point in time (as many as 4,500 seats), Birch Carroll and Coyle embarked on active marketing campaigns in local newspapers and communities to sell its American product and offset negative criticism of the industry that continued to appear in print. By the late 1920s, 'exploitation' was the industry buzzword used to describe these publicity campaigns. Regular reports, appearing in the trade journal *Everyones*, confirm that BC&C managers enthusiastically adopted American-based marketing techniques designed to maximize its regional audience. In order to counter negative publicity appearing in the press, newspapers themselves were targeted as key instruments for exploitation. Coordinating BC&C's strategy in Queensland was its assistant general manager, Keith Jeffries, formerly an executive with J.C. Williamson and a journalist with *Smith's Weekly* (Anon. 1927a: 3). Writing in *Everyones*, Jeffries recalled an early publicity stunt that he had organized in Sydney to coincide with the opening of *The Spanish Main* theatre production (by Oscar Asche at the Sydney Royal) at Christmas 1924. As part of the publicity, the press were induced to photograph a 'shark attack' in Sydney Harbour. In this way, stunts manufactured news for the press, especially the popular press, with both morning and evening papers carrying the story in question. Whether it acted more as a distraction than an assurance in such extreme cases is equally feasible. In Queensland centres, regional newspapers were also a part of BC&C's exploitation strategies, although local editors, usually senior journalists, had to be convinced that overwritten material supplied for this purpose was worthy of publication for its generally staid readership. The technical limitations of country papers were also tested in the process. In anticipation of the limited availability of display advertising and the inferior quality of local production, exhibitors were advised to have 'a type card with samples of the various types the printer has in stock. This will help in matching type and setting the best possible results' (M.G.L. 1930: 24). Prior to this, exhibitors relied mainly on handbills for advertising purposes but this technique was no longer favoured by larger American-influenced concerns.

Exhibitors like BC&C, in competition with local shows and productions, undertook themselves to host local activities in their regional venues. At Ipswich, Wintergarden manager Stuart McRae organized a 'special returned soldiers night' featuring the theatre's orchestra and street processions (Anon. 1926a: 26). This was as much about enhancing its reputation as a good community citizen as about the box office. In similar vein, local children at Maryborough were trained by Birch Carroll and Coyle to participate in its theatre prologues. In February 1927, its Wintergarden manager, W. Medcraf announced a very successful season during which it was 'frequently necessary on Saturday and Wednesday nights to turn people away' (Anon. 1927f: 65). Keen print publicists, Wintergarden managers like Medcraf were regular advertisers of local events including a Miss Australia competition, billed as 'the biggest event that had ever happened in Maryborough' (Anon. 1927f: 65).

In special productions, such as Fox's feature, *Iron Horse* (Ford, 1924), released into Queensland theatres in late 1926, regional campaigns were coordinated by Jeffries who toured the state for up to a month, liaising with theatre managers in regional cities. As the company's newly appointed 'exploiter', Jeffries appeared to be bent on using the *Iron Horse* campaign to make his mark, combining in the process 'all the essentials of the newspaper-cum-publicity man' (Anon. 1926b: 27) with the arrangement of 'clever novelties and effective tie-ups across the circuit' (Anon. 1926c: 9). Competitiveness was a trademark of BC&C's operations, both within and between cities. During 1928, for example, Bundaberg and Maryborough competed for prominence by offering Movie Week Supremes in their respective locations. While the Maryborough theatre hosted an elaborate prologue with local singers, the Bundaberg business 'secured a full page [of] co-operative advertisements in the Bundaberg Times through the business people, and, with special display accessories and snappy newspaper blocks and spectacular street stunts, chalked up highly satisfactory business over the week' (Anon. 1928a: 8).

Similarly, at Rockhampton, Wintergarden manager Tom Carrick, aided by the general manager's brother, C.R. Winterflood, rose to the challenge and was reported as having 'squeezed the last ounce of the box office, which worked overtime through street and other stunts' (Anon. 1928b: 8). Arguably the most voyeuristic and hazardous techniques employed at Rockhampton and elsewhere, with the possibility of reinforcing wowser stereotypes, were beauty competitions, held in conjunction with Paramount's 'The American Venus', during which, 'Rockhampton girls – and there are some very nice ones in "Rocky" [*sic*] – to the number of thirty, found in bathing costume, an enthusiastic audience (Anon. 1926c: 9).

Not all BC&C's exploitation campaigns went as planned. During 1927, renewed industrial unrest in the form of a railway strike adversely affected BC&C's Townsville operations. To aggravate matters *Everyones* reported in September of that year that 'Mr Jeffries, who has little time for anything but work, is not enamoured of the Queensland summer' (Anon. 1927e: 24). The 1927 strike, like others before it, jeopardized travel and distribution, forcing northern exhibitors to resort to 'stand-by programs' only.

On a day-to-day basis, regional theatre managers were responsible for local exploitation on a competitive basis (Anon. 1926b: 27). Birch Carroll and Coyle's visibility in regional Queensland was achieved through social networking as well as publicity. Having offered shares to their regional communities, BC&C managers were well placed to rub shoulders with local business, even though their mobility made close family ties unlikely in their multiple locations. Their profile was also critical in ensuring acceptance of BC&C's American product among conservative regional residents, including the more audacious techniques that they were encouraged to employ (Anon. 1926b: 27). One way to do this was to incorporate senior citizens, some of whom were still resistant to film but not to live performance. In regional Queensland, the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) was one such established group targeted for this purpose. Anzac Day entertainments became a regular regional event across the circuit (Boyle 2001: 93–94). No less significant were the concerts organized on St Patrick's Day in view of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church

in the regions and within government. At such times, the superior venues and local entertainment could be used to mitigate any moral reservations about American film content.

An important incentive for regional Wintergarden managers for sales and publicity purposes were the individual rewards and recognition to be gained through increased pay and exploitation competitions. Internal competitiveness, as noted above, was linked to the local marketing of individual films on an incentive basis. Competitions within Birch Carroll and Coyle were intense for, while the Wintergardens had the advantage of being superior venues, BC&C's other local managers, often in the same terms, proved equally adept at exploitation. At the time of the North Queensland railway strike, amid considerable disruption, the Townsville Wintergarden hosted 'Paramount Week' in conjunction with the feature film *Old Ironside*, running a 'Paramount Star' competition in the *Daily Standard*. *The Film Weekly* reporting on its success, explained how:

> Each day over a period of about a fortnight, photos of Paramount stars appeared on the front page of this paper in the form of a competition. The publicity value can easily be imagined as newspapers were selling like hot cakes on account of the strike. The Wintergarden has, to all intents and purposes, made a great bid for the Paramount Wintergarden shield.
>
> (Anon. 1927b: 24)

Through such activities, regional managers were marketing more than their own theatres. They were selling the medium itself including the

Figure 2: Townsville Wintergarden foyer with posters of Hollywood stars (Source: Birch Carroll and Coyle).

American film studios and their stars, which supported the local industry and encouraged their efforts.

Talkies and Depression

The Depression, which descended in 1929 and intensified in the early 1930s, posed renewed challenges for the movie industry. Exhibitors, forced to drop admission prices by as much as 25–40 per cent (Anon. 1930d: 4) were running into losses by 1931. Faced with the prospect of reduced admission prices, most exhibitors preferred to offer free tickets in association with advertising concessions. Tensions arose within the Queensland Picture Showmen's Association over the use of concession tickets by city cinemas to the detriment of suburban outlets (Anon. 1931b: 14). Metropolitan theatres found it necessary to dispense with their musicians and ushers to make ends meet. In the more extreme event of closure, exhibitors were still expected to pay out their contracts to the film companies that supplied them.

Compounding the difficulties of the industry was the message of austerity emanating from politicians and public figures, including Prime Minister Stanley Bruce who was determined to raise revenue by taxing amusements and cinema (Anon. 1929a: 3). With the onset of austerity, the glamour surrounding Hollywood became a more ambivalent social commodity; for while the cinema provided a refuge from harsh economic realities, it could equally be dismissed by detractors as a frivolous and dispensable form of leisure. Moral crusaders became more vocal in their denunciation of American standards, while hard-pressed governments considered the re-imposition of an entertainment tax as a means of raising revenue. Such sentiments were often widely canvassed in the Australian press (Anon. 1932a: 3).

In the late 1920s when the talkies became a commercial reality in Australia, the industry grappled with the onset of the talkies and the ensuing pressure from film companies to upgrade to sound. The local industry along with the press was initially divided about the appeal of the talkies. Despite the real economies to be derived from the discontinuation of live music and orchestras, the installation of sound equipment constituted a major capital outlay at a time when many exhibitors could ill afford it. Western Electric, the American-based company responsible for installing sound, embarked on this mammoth task in late 1928 before the worst of the Depression had been felt, but a combination of technical problems and uncertain investment meant that only three Australian theatres had been fully wired for sound by January 1929, at a time when 28 synchronized features were available for exhibition. The improved speed of installation, thereafter, corresponded with growing enthusiasm in the industry for the new technology throughout the 1930s, such that *The Film Weekly* could optimistically declare 'prospects for the Talkie season are particularly bright' (Anon. 1929c: 8; Yecies 2004). Other industry sources, faced with the prospect of redundancies, remained more sceptical on the grounds that, in the longer term, 'mere sound music, songs or dialogue will cease to be an attraction' (Dexter 1929: 3).

Despite its history of using live acts as well as screen entertainment, BC&C had few such inhibitions. From the outset, Birch Carroll and Coyle's

general manager, Bill Winterflood, was keen to press ahead with the installation of new sound technology. This posed particular financial challenges for the large Queensland picture palaces because, as Stuart Doyle explained, 'the cost of installation is based on seats and naturally the size of amplifiers' (Anon. 1928c: 7). The exorbitant installation fee of £10,000 for leased sound-on-disc equipment was indeed comparable with the outlays for new theatres and ongoing for as long as a decade. In spite of this and the Depression, Winterflood signed a series of agreements with Western Electric to install sound across the Wintergarden circuit (Birch Carroll and Coyle (BC&C) 1923–37 (1929–30)). So keen was Winterflood to proceed that BC&C agreed to install Western Electric's Vitaphone system, a technically challenging predecessor of the sound-on-film process, one which would soon be displaced in the early 1930s (Boyle et al. 2001: 76). Yecies points out that the decision to proceed with Western Electric in the first instance was in part the result of commercial pressures from distributors since they could not 'secure the approval of American distributors who withheld film from non-approved systems' (Yecies 2004).

At the same time, the Wintergardens were better placed to benefit from the arrival of the talkies, still of variable quality, since small exhibitors were likely to incur bankruptcy in making the transition from silent film. While Birch Carroll and Coyle's financial viability depended on the goodwill of American suppliers, it moved quickly at the onset of the Depression to take advantage of the new talkie phenomenon. With backing from Union Theatres, Western Electric had begun installing sound systems in the Wintergardens by July–August 1929. A huge exploitation campaign was planned by the group to coincide with local screenings of the first talking picture, Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927) in late 1929. *The Film Weekly*, covering the Brisbane campaign of April, confirmed the 'yards of newspaper space' procured for the occasion, the spectacular street stunts, the erection of a huge 70-foot high electric sign and the Wintergarden corps of usherettes in new uniforms (Anon. 1929c: 8). In the regions, preparations were also elaborate under the close supervision of Winterflood, who travelled between theatres in the lead-up to the Jolson feature. At Ipswich for example, the performance of *The Jazz Singer* was opened by the Lord Mayor, drawing crowds from a radius of 150 kilometres and grossing 'wonderful figures over a season of five nights and two matinees' (Anon. 1929e: 27). At the same time as the silent version of *The Jazz Singer* was screening on the Queensland regional circuit, the Wintergardens reaped the immediate benefit of the new talkies, despite the fact that the 1929 version comprised only a few songs and some unscripted dialogue (Boyle et al. 2001: 73).

Posters in the local Ipswich newspaper, the *Queensland Times*, proclaimed the new season with slogans such as 'Hear What You See' and 'The Entertainment Miracle of the Age' while supplementary live acts, important in view of the technical limitations of the early talkies, featured internationally acclaimed signers, musicians, comedians and vaudeville stars (Anon. 1929b: 9). Exploitation of the talkies was directed at a wide audience including those who were suffering the effects of the Depression. Winterflood, along with other industry spokesmen, espoused the view that pictures were an indispensable form of relaxation for the public and that

'the motion picture itself, is one, if not the greatest gift that science has given the masses' (Anon. 1930a: 23). Birch Carroll and Coyle's large-capacity theatres and traditions of live entertainment meant that it was increasingly able to cater for novelty among its well-to-do patrons.

After the Ipswich debut, *The Jazz Singer* continued its successful tour of Queensland, only weeks after sound had been installed and a few months after the opening of the new Bundaberg Wintergarden. At Rockhampton, the *Morning Bulletin* reported record attendances (Anon. 1929b: 9) and at the Bundaberg venue, amid intense exploitation, Winterflood extolled the superiority of the venue and its feature (Anon. 1929d: 24). The Wintergardens were indeed ahead of their local competitors, including other BC&C venues, which continued to show silent films. Thereafter, its exploitation targeted 'the greater talkie season' using local committees under the direction of the general manager (Anon. 1930b: 33). In regional centres the enterprising activities of individual employees including artistic directors were significant, but use of the press, including photos and display advertisements, remained an essential component (Anon. 1930a: 23).

Notwithstanding its initiatives and standing in the industry, BC&C was not immune from the sharp downturn. In the early 1930s, profits fell by 10 per cent for most years and a serious cash-flow problem developed in 1932. It was not until 1934, the first year in that decade that BC&C's major shareholder, Union Theatres, was able to return to profit, that stability began to return to the industry. Even Keith Jeffries, BC&C's indefatigable sales and marketing manager, suffered a personal setback when his newly-opened Wintergarden theatre at Dalby was destroyed by fire in early 1931 (Stephens 1931: 12). Inside the ruins lay the wreckage of Western Electric's recently installed sound equipment, along with several Pathe features. With the death of E.J. Carroll in the same year, Virgil Coyle, the only surviving member of the consortium, was appointed a managing director along with Dan Carroll, and offered a special remuneration of £300 per annum (BC&C 1923–37 (1932)). By the 1932 director's meeting, Dan Carroll, who continued to look after the company's finances in Sydney, made an unprecedented offer to reduce his yearly salary by £250, after he had been voted a comparable amount for his American travel expenses. The yearly salaries of BC&C's regional managers, like those of its executives, still appeared generous at £350–£500 but their autonomy and exploitation budgets were more restricted after the company instituted a system of monthly reports and centralized its finances. Consequently, exploitation campaigns were affected, while optimistic plans for new theatres had to be postponed in favour of running repairs to existing venues (BC&C 1923–37 (1934)).

During June 1930, Mr H.C. McIntyre, general manager for Universal Films in Australia and New Zealand, returning from New York, confirmed the trend back to vaudeville. Like Dan Carroll earlier, he had recommended that only the high-quality films be screened to counter dwindling audiences, but even this measure to which BC&C adhered, appeared insufficient in depressed regional Queensland of mid-1932, leading him to observe that: 'Every town in Queensland is suffering from an identical trouble. They come along Saturday but, the rest of the week they find

themselves something else to do or go to bed' (Anon. 1932g). Cinema attendances, the author continued, were particularly affected in the sugar areas where the industry was near collapse – at Bundaberg, at Ayr and to a lesser extent at Townsville, where local Wintergarden manager, Bill Locke, was leaving 'no stunt unturned when a big picture (comes) along' (Anon. 1932g). At the Rockhampton Wintergarden, too, there was 'nothing reminiscent of the boom days', although the Maryborough theatre was still 'doing the business of the town' at near capacity for a 'repeat run of Viennese Nights' (Anon. 1932g). Herc McIntyre, in the same report, went on to conclude that 'the tone of film advertising must alter slightly to meet the changing conditions' (Anon. 1932g). Regional managers and agents should now impress upon patrons, across the social spectrum, 'the idea of living for the present', instilling, in the process, an urge to spend and attend regularly rather that spasmodically.

In the austere economic climate, Birch Carroll and Coyle's regional exploitation continued unabated but on an understanding of limited resources. When the renowned Vic Hobler promoted *The Shanghai Express* (von Sternberg, 1932) at Ipswich in mid-1932, using men dressed as Chinese to carry a lady through the streets, it was noted that 'the price of organising this stunt was very small compared to the amount of publicity derived therefrom' (Anon. 1926d: 33). At Bundaberg, Dick Winterflood, the general manager's brother, who had the unenviable task of drumming up local audiences, ran 'no cost' campaigns using horses, a boxing ring and street theatre for *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Mamoulian, 1932). One BC&C response to the Depression, allied to its increasing bid for a younger audience, was the introduction of serials as part of a strategy to revive the mid-week audience. This was a direct outcome of the influential McIntyre visit and report. Thereafter, programming changes occurred twice a week, rather than simply on weekends, with the first episode screening on Saturday night and the second in mid-week (Anon. 1926d: 33). This strategy, adopted under difficult circumstances, reversed that of the 1920s by first appealing to children with subsequent parental involvement. An associated technique was the launching of children's movie clubs with prizes, handouts and club medallions (Anon. 1932g: n.p.).

Exploitation continued during the Depression years at a time when the press was running its own campaigns against cinema on moral grounds. In Queensland, where the Catholic Church exercised considerable influence over successive state Labour governments, *Everyones* ran its own campaign against the prospect of the clergy conducting screenings of movies deemed suitable for young viewers, in defiance of exhibitors (Anon. 1932d: 12). Such campaigns, in turn, revived antagonism between the industry and the press (Anon. 1932d: 12). In certain respects, notably in its relationship with the press and pulpit, the industry, including Birch Carroll and Coyle, had come full circle over the decade 1925–35. From the outset, BC&C's ambitious theatre construction programme and regional publicity campaigns were designed to win over sections of the middle class which resisted its imported product on moral as well as cultural grounds. The 1927 Royal Commission, while inconclusive in some respects, had done much to bring these concerns to the surface, concerns which were to resurface during the austerity of the early 1930s.

Along with other Australian exhibitors, Birch Carroll and Coyle were handicapped during the Depression by the high cost of film hire from American suppliers. A long letter by its chairman to Warners, one of its major suppliers, confirmed that BC&C was paying 40–50 per cent on film hire at this time. Annual outlays in 1933 constituted £5,507, exceeding its annual returns (BC&C 1923–37 (1933); Anon. 1937a: 25). Annual rentals of its regional theatres were another substantial outlay that it sought to renegotiate with some success (BC&C 1923–37 (1933)). Dan Carroll, in broaching the sensitive issue of film hire with distributors, was careful to point out that his company had not entered into public criticism of American suppliers in the manner of local politicians or the press:

> We have a very large number of shareholders, actually in excess of seven hundred who are residents of the various towns in which we trade. We have never entered into any propaganda in statements to our shareholders against the Distributor and we submit that apart from equity and fairness, it would be in the best interests of the picture business generally to permit this company to trade at a profit.
>
> (Carroll in BC&C 1923–37 (1935))

In spite of the film hire situation, Birch Carroll and Coyle began to return to modest profitability by the mid-1930s. Importantly, too, Union Theatres, as a major BC&C shareholder with close connections to the American studios, also returned to profit in 1934, after sustaining a massive loss of more than £100,000 in 1931 (Anon. 1935a: 4).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Birch Carroll and Coyle's early achievement lay as much in enhancing the social appeal of regional cinema-going as in its tradition of mixed entertainment. For most of its first decade, the Wintergarden experience contrasted with less auspicious trends in smaller suburban and regional Queensland theatres, where informality of dress and presentation prevailed (Scales 1936: 6). Along with its high-quality commodious venues, 'state of the art' technology and increasingly Americanized product, publicity and exploitation, promoted in industry journals like *Everyones*, were paramount to its high regional profile over the decade in question. Much of the responsibility for such initiatives rested with its experienced regional managers, often in competition with one another and with other local BC&C venues. By the mid-1930s, the acknowledged master of exploitation on the Wintergarden circuit was the redoubtable Vic Hobler who, as manager at Townsville and Ipswich, succeeded in winning the coveted Paramount Shield four years in succession (Anon. 1934a: 26). After resigning from Birch Carroll and Coyle in 1935, Hobler moved to Sydney where he was appointed director of publicity with RKO-Radio Pictures (Anon. 1935b: 5). His remarkable career, which began with a Rockhampton independent exhibition, ranged across the Wintergarden circuit and epitomized the broader career trend identified by Collins, whereby publicity people enjoyed 'inflated salaries' but also 'changed jobs frequently' (Collins 1987: 149).

In direct contrast to Hobler's career path was that of Keith Jeffries, one of BC&C's 'tinselled executives' of the 1920s, who was appointed as assistant manager of its Queensland operations on the basis of his previous exploitation experience in Sydney. A workaholic and prominent exponent of the new publicity techniques, Jeffries did much to promote exploitation across the circuit. Yet his reminiscences offer a cautionary tale about the role and the effectiveness of the exploitation techniques that he and his staff had practised during the period. After his Dalby Wintergarden was destroyed by fire, Jeffries discarded his American flashiness for a 'family man' image as manager of the modest Strand Theatre in nearby Toowoomba:

> In a country town I found that personal contact was everything and by the same token I could sell a picture by word of mouth better than all the routine stunts put together. [...] I think the industry would be much better off if some of the executives were to get out in the 'foreign field' and serve a worthwhile apprenticeship.
>
> (Jeffries 1954: 11)

It was an extraordinary admission on Jeffries's part, akin to a '*mea culpa*', and a keen reminder that even BC&C's vigorous publicity machine, epitomized by Jeffries in the 1920s and Hobler in the 1930s, had been blunted on occasion in the hard grind and financial austerity of the Depression years, while its audience strategies also shifted to accommodate all social classes in the unprecedented austerity of the new decade.

References

Andrews, H. (1937), 'Hal Andrews Takes us Back to the Battling Days', *The Film Weekly*, 16 December, p. 62.

Anon. (1925a), 'Political Points: The Entertainment Tax', *Everyones*, 31 October, p. 4.

—— (1925b), 'Tariff Board Hears Proposed Increased Quotas for Imported Films', *Everyones*, 5 August, p. 6.

—— (1926a), 'Ipswich Extends Itself', *Everyones*, 16 September, p. 26.

—— (1926b), 'Jeffries Exploiting Well', *The Film Weekly*, 7 October, p. 27.

—— (1926c), 'Jeffries at Townsville', *The Film Weekly*, 23 September, p. 9.

—— (1926d), 'Queensland Picture Showmen's Association Annual Report', *Everyones*, 14 April, p. 33.

—— (1926e), 'Rockhampton Competition Brings Forth Beauties', *The Film Weekly*, 23 September, p. 9.

—— (1927a), 'The Art of Catching Newspaper Feature Space', *Everyones*, 9 November, p. 3.

—— (1927b), 'At the Wintergarden', *The Film Weekly*, 15 September, p. 24.

—— (1927c), 'Australia Has No Romance: Racing Only National Trait', *Everyones*, 23 November, p. 6.

—— (1927d), 'BC&C's Right-hand Man', *The Film Weekly*, 12 May, p. 3.

—— (1927e), 'Jeffries Active', *The Film Weekly*, 8 September, p. 24.

—— (1927f), 'Medcraf at Maryborough', *Everyones*, 2 February, p. 65.

—— (1928a), 'Exploitation Pays', *The Film Weekly*, 23 September, p. 8.

—— (1928b), 'The Iron Horse in Rocky', *The Film Weekly*, 7 October, p. 8.

—— (1928c), 'A Pedagogue's Outburst', *The Film Weekly*, 15 November, p. 3.

—— (1928d), 'Stuart F. Doyle Speaks', *The Film Weekly*, 15 November, p. 7.

—— (1928e), 'Winterflood First Queensland Witness', *Everyones*, 22 June, p. 9.

—— (1929a), 'Federal Political Crisis Holds up Tax', *Everyones*, 12 September, p. 3.

—— (1929b) 'Review of *The Jazz Singer*', *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, 23 July, p. 9.

—— (1929c), 'Selling the "Talkies"', *The Film Weekly*, 18 April, p. 8.

—— (1929d), 'Talkies at Bundaberg', *The Film Weekly*, 29 August, p. 24.

—— (1929e), 'Talkies in Queensland', *Everyones*, 11 July, p. 27.

—— (1930a), 'Greater Talkie Season', *The Film Weekly*, 17 July, p. 23.

—— (1930b), 'How to Organise a Successful Greater Talkie Season', *The Film Weekly*, 27 November, p. 33.

—— (1930c), 'Motion Pictures', *The Film Weekly*, 17 July, p. 23.

—— (1930d), 'Panic won't help', *Everyones*, 20 August, p. 4.

—— (1931a), 'Bringing the Kids Back to the Matinees', *The Film Weekly*, 12 March, p. 27.

—— (1931b), 'Exhibitors discuss concession tickets veto', *Everyones*, 22 July, p. 14.

—— (1932a), 'The Back Bone of the Business', *Everyones*, 11 May, p. 3.

—— (1932b), 'Bad Position of Exhibs. [*sic*] Leasing Halls', *Everyones*, 27 April, p. 3.

—— (1932c), 'Dan Carroll tells why he bought Universal serials', *The Film Weekly*, advertisement, 4 August, n.p.

—— (1932d), 'Pictures and the Pulpit', *Everyones*, 17 August, p. 12.

—— (1932e), 'Press, Pulpit and Pictures', *Everyones*, 9 November, p. 4.

—— (1932f), 'Shanghai Express in Ipswich', *The Film Weekly*, 16 June, p. 26.

—— (1932g), 'Touring with Herc McIntyre throughout Queensland', *Everyones*, 8 June, p. 7.

—— (1934a), 'Paramount Exploitation Shield: Prize Winning Managers', *Everyones,* 24 October, p. 26.

—— (1934b), 'Purves Turns Back the Clock', *Everyones*, 14 March, p. 16.

—— (1935a), 'GUT Turns £114,268 Loss in '31 into £14,864 Profit in '34', *Everyones*, 10 July, p. 4.

—— (1935b), 'Vic Hobler is RKO Publicity Director', *Everyones*, 13 May, p. 5.

—— (1937a), 'Higher Profits Earned by BCC', *The Film Weekly*, 5 August, p. 25.

—— (1937b), 'Union Theatres Ltd Acquire More Theatre Interests', *The Film Weekly*, 28 July, p .4.

Baxter, J. (1986), *Filmstruck: Australia at the Movies*, Sydney: ABC Books.

Birch Carroll and Coyle Ltd. (BC&C) (1923–37), Director's Minutes. [Brisbane: Birch Carroll and Coyle Ltd.]

Boyle, R., Burke, C., Cosgrove, B. and Cryle, D. (2001), *The Rockhampton Wintergarden Theatre: A Heritage Study*, Rockhampton: CQU Centre for Social Science Research.

Collins, D. (1987), *Hollywood Down Under: Australians at the Movies: 1896 to the Present Day*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

Cryle, D. and Johansen, J. (2006), 'Maintaining a Tradition of Mixed Entertainments: Birch Carroll and Coyle's regional Queensland Wintergarden Theatres', *Screening the Past*, 19, available at

http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/histrelease/pr19/CJfr9.html Accessed 10 July 2007.

—— (2007), 'The Establishment of Birch Carroll and Coyle as a Regional Queensland Consortium ca. 1909–1923', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 90, pp. 35–42.

Dexter, G. (1929), *Everyones*, editorial, 9 January, p. 3.

Doyle, S. (1924), 'In Defence of Film Industry', *Everyones*, 26 November, p. 18.

Gayle, D. (1927), 'A Few Instructions', *Everyones*, 18 May, p. 5.

Gerard. D. (2003), interview with Grace Johansen, 4 August.

Glaney, M. (2005), 'The Special Relationship and the Cinema: Anglo-American Audiences and Film Preferences',

http:///www.ud.ac/history/conferences/neale-comm2005/glaney.doc Accessed 10 July 2007.

Jeffries, K. (1954), 'Big Circuits and the Bush', *Everyones*, 14 March, p. 11.

McIntyre, H.C. (1930), 'The Motion Picture Situation in USA', *The Film Weekly*, 30 June, p. 6.

M.G.L. (1930), 'Institutional Exploitation', *Everyones*, 10 April, p. 24.

Queensland Times (1929), advertisement for *The Jazz Singer*, 1 July, p. 9.

Scales, H. (1936), 'Along Film Row: Queensland's Real Showmen', *Everyones*, 22 January, p. 6.

Soden, H.E. (1921), 'Picture Theatre Admission Prices', *Everyones*, 17 August, p. 11.

Stephens, R.F. (1931), 'What a Fire did to Dalby Wintergarden', *Everyones*, 1 March, p. 12.

Tomsic, M. (2004), 'Women's memories of cinema-going', *History Australia*, 2: 1 (December), pp. 06-1–06-12.

Waterhouse, R. (1990), *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, Kensington: University of New South Wales Press.

Yecies, B. (2004), 'Failures and successes: local and national Australian sound innovations, 1924–1929', *Screening the Past*, 16,

http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr_16/byfr16.html Accessed 10 July 2007.

Oral history interviews cited

Cunningham, N. (2003), interview with Grace Johansen, 8 May.

Watson, J. and Watson, M. (2003), interview with Grace Johansen, 7 May.

Suggested citation

Cryle, D. and Johansen G. (2007), 'Exploiting the regional Queensland audience: Birch Carroll and Coyle's Wintergarden theatres, 1925–35', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 333–351. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.333/1

Contributor details

Professor Denis Cryle lectures in Communication and Media Studies at Central Queensland University and has published widely on Queensland culture and on the history of media. He is the co-author of *The Rockhampton Wintergarden Theatre: A Heritage Study* (2001). Contact: Communication School Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education Central Queensland University Rockhampton, QLD 4072 E-mail: d.cryle@cqu.edu.au

Dr Grace Johansen is an active regional historian and has researched the history of women in twentieth-century central Queensland, including their social and cultural experiences, as part of her doctoral research. Contact: Communication School Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education Central Queensland University Rockhampton, QLD 4072
E-mail: w.johansen@cqu.edu.au

intellect journals / theatre & music

Journal of **Community Music**

ISSN 1752-6299

Aims and Scope

The *International Journal of Community Music* is a refereed journal that publishes research articles, practical discussions, timely reviews, readers' notes and special issues concerning all aspects of Community Music. Our editorial board is composed of leading international scholars and practitioners spanning diverse disciplines that reflect the scope of Community Music practice and theory. Accordingly, the Editorial Board of the IJCM holds an open concept of Community Music providing a responsive scope that is able to reflect the breath of current international practice.

Editors
David Wright
david.elliott@nyu.edu

Lee Higgins
l.higgins@lipa.ac.uk

Associate editor
Kari Veblen

Subscribing
IJCM is published three times per year. Contact us for a subscription order form: Intellect, Sales, The Mill, Parnall Rd, Bristol BS16 3JG, UK.

Current subscription rates: £33 (pers.) / £210 (instit.)
(Postage is free within the UK, £9 in the EU and £12 outside the EU.)

Free E-access
Intellect offers free access to all our journals in electronic form to users in institutions where there is a library subscription to the print version of that journal.

Advertising Enquiries
and bookings should be addressed to: Intellect, Journals Marketing, The Mill, Parnall Road, Bristol BS16 3JG, UK.

Volume 1, 2008
£210 / One Issue
Print & full electronic access

Tel: +44 (0)117 9589910 / orders@intellectbooks.com / www.intellectbooks.com

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.353/1

Rural cinema audiences in South Australia in the 1930s

Dylan Walker *Flinders University*

Abstract

Very few South Australian local histories give any account of the ritual screening of films in local community halls and regional picture theatres. Given that the 1930s was a turbulent era for the exhibition industry, the survival of the rural picture show beyond the decade suggests that it played a significant role in local history. This article will discuss the distribution and exhibition of films in rural South Australia during the early 1930s and the impact of legislation on the small operators. It goes on to examine the cinema-going preferences of the mid-north town of Snowtown during two years from July 1933 to June 1935 and considers the factors other than taste that determined the popularity of a screening.

Keywords

South Australia
Snowtown
rural film exhibition
cinema-going preferences

The importance of picture shows in rural and regional communities in Australia during the 1930s has largely been overlooked. One example of this is that very few of the plethora of local histories written to celebrate South Australia's sesquicentenary in 1986, and those written since, give any account of the regular screening of films in local community halls. The picture show was the dominant all-year amusement in rural South Australia, as elsewhere in Australia, and based on this alone it deserves a larger place in Australian social histories. The 1930s was a turbulent era for the entertainment industries with the introduction of the talkies, the effect of the Great Depression on people's disposable income and, in South Australia, an active campaign by the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to ensure rural halls were complying with the stringent regulations governing entertainment venues. The survival of the rural picture show beyond the decade suggests that it played an even more important role in local history.

This article will discuss the distribution and exhibition of films in rural South Australia during the 1930s with a particular focus on the cinema-going preferences of the mid-north town of Snowtown during two years in the early 1930s. It is a part of a much larger study that examines the hierarchal structure of film distribution and exhibition throughout the rural and regional areas of the state.

The choice of Snowtown as a case study is based on the availability of data. The difficulty in presenting a picture of cinema-going preferences during the 1930s is the lack of data. While newspaper advertisements provide some idea of screenings, not all picture show venues advertised their programmes in the paper. When they did, it is difficult to ascertain the popularity of the screenings that were advertised. Editorial content given over to picture screenings were generally previews rather than reviews.

They were often directly copied from the film distributor's publicity sheet and were not reflective of cinema-goers' opinions. However, newspaper advertisements can provide a picture of where films travelled to after they had finished the suburban circuit.

The State Records of South Australia (SRSA) has in its holdings the 'Treasurer's Nightly Statements for the Snowtown Institute Talkies' covering the 1933–34 and 1934–35 financial years.[1] For amusement tax purposes, these statements provide the admissions to each screening, broken down by ticket price. Although the statements do not specify what films were screened, the Snowtown Institute Talkies did advertise weekly in the local paper, *The Stanley Herald*, which circulated through towns within a 26-kilometre radius of Snowtown. The collation of these two sets of data, taking into consideration other variables that may affect a person's decision as whether or not to go to the pictures, provides a snapshot of the business conducted by a rural picture show for two years during the Depression and goes some way to indicating rural audience preferences.

Rural and regional cinema in South Australia up to the 1930s

In January 1930, there were 170 licensed theatres and halls in South Australia being used permanently for picture shows, of which 13 were equipped to screen talkies. There were also 5 travelling picture show companies touring country districts (SRSA, GRG67/33/1930/1). The number of halls screening picture shows in rural areas which did not come under the provisions of the Places of Public Entertainment Act 1913 was even greater. Unimpeded by compliance with the Act's regulations, picture shows were able to be screened in small halls to small audiences which ensured that a culture of cinema-going was developed in the smallest of rural towns.

Country South Australia was introduced to the picture show within one year of the first screenings in Australia. Phillip Newberry, 'the Great English Tenor' brought the 'cinematographe' direct from Melbourne and screened moving pictures as a part of his act at the Mount Gambier Institute Hall for three nights in January 1897 (Anon. 1897: 2). The next month, Wybert Reeve, the manager of Adelaide's Theatre Royal, embarked on a series of tours of country areas and by the close of 1897, he had screened in towns as far as Peterborough in the north, Broken Hill in the east, Northern Yorke Peninsula in the west and Victor Harbor in the south. The popularity of these picture shows can be best illustrated when Carl Hertz screened at Burra, in the mid-north region of the state in October 1897. The audience had begun arriving at 7 p.m. and by the advertised time of 8 p.m. every seat in the Institute Hall was taken.

The practice of showmen setting up their projection equipment in the middle of a hall and screening highly inflammable nitrate film by limelight led to calls for cinema regulations. Several attempts were made to regulate the picture show industry and by 1913, comprehensive legislation was passed (Walker 1996: 24–26). However, the Places of Public Entertainment Act 1913 was only applicable to the metropolitan area of Adelaide and could be extended to rural areas only by proclamation.

Picture shows opened in country towns at a rapid rate. Royal Pictures began regular screenings in the Clare Valley and on their opening night in

1. All references to State Records of South Australia material will be referred to by the initials SRSA followed by the appropriate archival record number. Full SRSA reference details are provided in a separate list at the end of the article.

Clare in 1911, the Town Hall was filled to capacity and many people were turned away (Noye 2003: 29). On the Yorke Peninsula, National Pictures began screening at various halls in 1911 and the following year Prince's Pictures began screening on the evening following National's screenings. By 1914 country circuits were well established in South Australia and regular reports on their activities begin to appear in the trade magazine, *Australian Kinematograph Journal*. There were 11 companies, covering 18 towns, which were referred to in the journal. It is also at this time that the first reference to bicycling prints appears – a practice that was to become common. George Holland, the proprietor of Olympic Pictures, was only able to hire *Quo Vadis* (Guazzoni, 1913) for one night but managed to successfully screen it at three of his venues several miles apart (Anon. 1913: 14).

The number of country picture shows initially grew unimpeded by the 1913 regulations. Unlike venues in the Adelaide metropolitan area, rural halls did not have to comply with strict legislation, such as annual licences and the requirement to have a bio-box separate from the hall. This made them cheap venues to hire by travelling picture showmen. In addition to its picture show at Clare, Royal Pictures also screened in the small nearby towns of Blyth, Auburn, Mintaro and Watervale (Noye 2003: 29). Had the regulations been enforceable in country areas, it is likely that prohibitive costs associated with compliance would have denied the culture of the picture show to smaller towns.

Up until 1922 there had only been six proclamations extending the Places of Public Entertainment Act. These were to Burra and Renmark (1915), Wallaroo (1917), Port Pirie and Port Augusta (1918) and Murray Bridge (1919). From 1922 to 1932, the Act was expanded dramatically, being extended to 244 towns and leaving very few places in the state not covered by the legislation. The extension of the Act in the early 1930s brought stress to hall committees in areas that had recently only just survived two years of drought and then had to face the worst economic depression of the twentieth century.

To a small community the cost of complying with the Places of Public Entertainment regulations was considerable. The hall had to be licensed as a place of public entertainment whether it screened films or not. Before a licence was issued the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment or a local constable, who was authorized under the Act, carried out a meticulous inspection. The regulations specified seating space for each individual (not less than 17 inches by 30 inches), lighting, number of exits and separate sanitary accommodation for both sexes, as well as prohibiting the screening of films on a Sunday. If picture shows were to be held in the hall, it had to have a bio-box. The annual licence fee was determined by the capacity of the hall. For a hall with a seating capacity of more than 50 but less than 350, which most rural halls were, the annual licence fee was £3. Cinematograph operators also needed to be licensed. The fee to undergo the onerous test for a licence was £1 1s and then it cost five shillings to renew the licence every year. There were heavy penalties for cinema-goers who smoked, expectorated or threw objects in the auditorium of the hall. For the larger picture shows in regional centres with a seating capacity over 700, there was the added burden of paying the local fire brigade eight shillings per screening to have a trained fireman in attendance.

The effect of the Act in rural areas can be best illustrated by some of the responses to the Inspector's blitz on halls on the Eyre Peninsula in 1933. The committee of Denial Bay hall advised the Inspector that besides not having the funds to build a bio-box on the outside of the building, there would be little return for their investment as the picture show was held only every three weeks and would be lucky to have more than 30 people attend (SRSA, GRG67/33/1933/108). The committee of Mount Hope Hall held picture shows every two months and had audiences of less than 50. They suggested that instead of having a bio-box they could get the travelling picture showman to set up his projector outside of the building and screen into the auditorium through the front door (SRSA, GRG67/33/1933/112). In July 1933, the secretary of the Yeelanna Hall Trust wrote to the Inspector explaining that they were not aware they were breaking the law, and that given the hall was let out occasionally to travelling picture showmen, they had to consider whether it was worth the expense of erecting a bio-box (SRSA, GRG67/33/ 1933/120).

The travelling picture showman referred to in Yeelanna's letter was F.N. (Norm) Stubing of Cleve Talkies, which covered the Eyre Peninsula. In response to the many letters from hall committees explaining that they could not afford to erect a bio-box, the Inspector put forward a commercial proposal:

> Mr Stubing the Proprietor of the Cleve Picture Show called on me recently, and stated that in the event of the Hall Committee not erecting the Cinema Room, he could be prepared to construct this room, provided of course your Committee were agreeable, however, he has been furnished with full particulars, and will confer with you in the matter.
>
> (SRSA, GRG67/33/1933/115)

This became a standard paragraph in the Inspector's letter and indicates that regulators and showmen worked cooperatively at times. It is evident that a number of halls on the Eyre Peninsula took up Norm Stubing's offer. In January 1934, Cleve Talkies advertised screenings at a number of halls to which the Inspector had written. The offer was the only alternative for cash-strapped hall committees but how viable was it for Stubing? In an article about the local council building a new bio-box at the Yorketown Institute on the Yorke Peninsula, the cost is given as £40 (Anon. 1932a: 3). For Stubing to outlay this amount on his Eyre Peninsula circuit, he must have been confident of his return for screening films in those halls.

The Inspector had no legal basis for placing demands on the many small halls on the Eyre Peninsula as the Act had only been extended to ten major towns in that area by 1933. A number of representations had been made to the Chief Secretary with a view to extending the Act to the rest of the peninsula. From the letters on file, this appears to be an orchestrated campaign with petitions arriving within days of each other from various groups, such as the Cleve Progress Association, and individuals of whom at least two were at pains to point out, 'we are staunch supporters of the Liberal Party, we stand for sound principles and good government'. In a minute to the Chief Secretary, dated 2 November 1933, the Inspector advised:

> Before the question of extending the Act to other places be considered, I would recommend that the owners of all the Halls on Eyre's Peninsula be requested not to let buildings for cinema picture shows, dancing, or other entertainment on Sundays, also Picture Show Proprietors, and if it is found that no notice is taken, a proclamation should be gazetted bringing the whole of the area under the provisions of the Act.
>
> (SRSA, GRG67/1933/164)

The Inspector's reluctance to recommend an extension of the Act may have been due to the difficulty in policing the Act. The police constables who were gazetted as authorized inspectors were required, or felt compelled, to write extensive police reports for the most trivial breaches of the regulations. In an earlier case, the local constable at Tumby Bay had to ride 20 miles by horseback to Ungarra to ascertain from the secretary of the Ungarra Hall committee why the outstanding licence fee for the hall had not been paid. The police report, dated 20 July 1932, gives an insight into the financial hardship that rural communities were facing: 'the amount had not been paid because all the Hall funds and the money of most people concerned in the Hall was held up through the closing of the Primary Producers Bank' (SRSA, GRG67/33/1930/37).

The small halls were not the only places of public entertainment to feel the effects of the Depression. Three picture theatres in the regional centre of Port Lincoln on southern Eyre Peninsula were experiencing a decline in audience numbers. The Flinders Theatre closed for several months in 1931 and when it re-opened screening talkies in mid-1932, the manager argued that although the seating capacity of the theatre was 847, the number attending was very small. Through the representation of the local Member of Parliament, the Inspector agreed to reduce the capacity to 690 thus eliminating the requirement to have a fireman in attendance.

Elsewhere in the state, the effects of the downturn in the rural economy had begun to appear as early as the winter of 1928. William Turner, who ran Berri Pictures in the Riverland, wrote to the Inspector requesting that he pay only half of his annual licence and the other half in six months time 'as things are still in a very bad way up here' (SRSA, GRG67/33/1922/108). He received an unsympathetic response from the Inspector and the only way he could pay the £7 10s was by a post-dated cheque. One year later Turner wrote to the Inspector, 'things have been very bad on the River, but prospects are looking bright for a big improvement next year'. Little was anyone to realize at that time that the worse was yet to come.

South of Adelaide, picture showmen also felt the pressure to reduce costs or shut up shop. Labouring under the misapprehension that it would lower his licensing cost, the owner of Goolwa Centenary Hall wrote to the Inspector in 1932 hoping to convince him to reduce the capacity of the hall from 350 people to 100. He wrote that he had decided to close down the hall 'on account of the bad times and excessive taxation'. He enclosed his takings return as an indication – 27 sixpenny admissions for four nights. Ironically, five years later, the hall owner was being taken to task by the Inspector for overcrowding, sometimes squeezing 400 to 500 people into the hall (SRSA, GRG67/33/1929/231).

These are but a few examples of the many letters written to the Inspector highlighting the hardships being felt by picture show proprietors

at the beginning of the 1930s. It is in this context that Bill Benbow was exhibiting films at local halls on his small but expanding circuit of rural towns. His activity at the Snowtown Institute from July 1933 to June 1935 gives more detailed insight into the local picture show at this time.

Bill Benbow and Snowtown

Snowtown is a rural town situated about 145 kilometres north of Adelaide in South Australia's mid-north region. In 1933, the District of Snowtown, which took in the marginally smaller neighbouring town of Lochiel and the much smaller neighbouring town of Barunga, covered 111,600 hectares in area and had a population of 2,199.

Up until 1922, touring picture showmen used the Snowtown Institute Hall on a regular basis to screen films. In 1922 the Institute committee took over operating the picture shows. At the time, the township was experiencing difficulties in raising money for a new Soldiers' Memorial Hall and it was thought that the picture show takings would contribute significantly to the funds. A local with knowledge of mechanics, George Francis, offered his services as the projectionist and, according to the local newspaper, it was 'anticipated that sympathetic local musicians (would) contribute the music' (Anon. 1922a: 2). A plant costing £236 was installed and the first show run by the committee screened on 24 April 1922. For the opening night a single feature, *The Kentuckians* (Maigne, 1921), was screened which was supported by a short, the Mack Sennett comedy, *Ladies First* (Del Ruth and Grainger, 1918). Admission prices were two shillings for the back seats and one shilling for the front seats with children being admitted for half-price. The night's takings were £16 6s 6d and according to the local newspaper it was a 'very fine result […] with sustained public support, little time should elapse before the desire of many is realised' (Anon. 1922b: 2).

The Institute committee encountered only one hiccup in the first year of operation. Snowtown was not subject to the Places of Public Entertainment Act 1913 when the venture was being considered, and for the first few months of operation. When the Act was extended to the town in August 1922, the strict regulations came into force including the requirement that projectionists be licensed. The committee did not seem to be aware of this regulation until four months later and closed the hall to picture shows for three weeks in January 1923 as George Francis did not have an operator's licence. Either through the Inspector not pursuing the issue or the committee choosing to ignore the regulations, after not screening for three weeks the weekly show resumed with an unlicensed operator until June 1925. The local paper reported, '[…] in order to comply with the regulation, Mr Francis has been adding to his already considerable knowledge of machine manipulation, and intends entering an examination for this, about March' (Anon. 1923: 2). There was some difficulty in Mr Francis taking time off from his employment with South Australian Railways to travel to Adelaide to undergo the examination and it was not until June 1925 that he became a licensed operator (SRSA, GRG67/33/1925/63).

By 30 June 1922, the Snowtown Institute had outlaid £236 on the picture show plant and £54 on the hire of films, freight and advertising. It had taken £107 at the ticket box, which, in a matter of three months, represented 16 per cent of the hall's annual revenue (Anon. 1922c: 2).

Taking into account the initial outlay and ongoing expenses of film hire (usually a flat fee of £3 per film), freight, advertising, entertainment tax and the operator's wages (ten shillings per screening), it was not until October 1923, eighteen months after the opening night, that the books were in the black (SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12). One year later, the building of the new Snowtown Memorial Hall commenced. The plant was transferred from the old Institute Hall to the new hall and a new 'bio machine' was installed, at a cost of £120. The new hall's licence allowed for 450 seats, although it is unlikely that that many seats were installed.

Sound represented a significant financial challenge for rural exhibitors and Snowtown provides a good example of the way distributors used the new technology to leverage advantage over exhibitors. In June 1932, the South Australian manager for Paramount Film Service wrote informing the Institute committee of an exhibitor's approach to lease the Memorial Hall and install sound reproduction equipment. 'This would not be a touring show, but a stationary plant' (SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12). The exhibitor may have approached the distributor for information on places still running silent picture shows. While it was likely that Paramount would have written the same letter to several rural hall committees, there may have been an additional benefit in encouraging Snowtown to install sound equipment. In November 1931, the Snowtown Institute committee entered into a block package arrangement with Paramount for thirteen programmes consisting of two features and short films to be screened fortnightly commencing 5 December 1931 and expiring 28 May 1932 (SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12). This arrangement continued up until the screening of the first talkies in Snowtown on 18 November 1932. If the exhibitor referred to in Paramount's letter had a similar arrangement, Paramount would be able to retain Snowtown in its territory.

Paramount's offer could not have arrived at a better time. There had been a downturn in cinema-going in Snowtown in the early 1930s and screenings were reduced to once a fortnight. Compared to the takings of £512 in the 1922–23 financial year and £718 in 1923–24 (SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12), the 1930–31 financial year takings were dismal at only £176. They dropped further the following financial year to £159 whereas the hire of the films had only dropped from £66 to £65 (Anon. 1932b: 2). The concept of an external exhibitor, backed by a leading distributor, taking on the financial responsibility of installing sound equipment and leasing the hall must have appealed to the Institute committee.

It is quite possible that the exhibitor referred to in Paramount's letter was Frederick Jeffery of Adelaide as the following month the secretary of the Institute committee wrote to two picture theatres and three institutes seeking an opinion on the 'Jeffery Talking Picture Plant'. The committee asked if there was any increase in admission charges, any increase in attendance and any further insurance risk (SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12). There is one lengthy letter of advice on file, but it seems that the committee decided to take another approach and advertise for tenders in an Adelaide newspaper (Anon. 1932c: 4). Given that the Snowtown region was already feeling the effects of the Depression, the committee would have had great concerns that the potential revenue from screening talkies was an unknown. In 1933, 53 per cent of Snowtown's working population were employed in the agricultural and

pastoral industry and 69 per cent of the working population earned less than £3 per week (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics 1936–1940: 1933 Census Data). Local farmers were already suffering financial difficulties because of poor crops in 1928, 1929 and 1930, and then wheat prices began to drop. In the 1929–30 season, a bushel of wheat would bring 4s 4d. These prices held out during the 1929–30 harvest but dropped to as low as 18d per bushel as the farmers started to cart their wheat. The price of wool also fell from the average of 18d per pound in 1928 to 14d per pound in 1929, $9\frac{1}{4}$d in 1930, then an all time low of $7\frac{1}{2}$d in 1931 (Jones 1978: 308). The flow-on effects of the economic plight of farmers was felt within the town. As the farmers reduced their hired labour, so would the town businesses. The district council reduced rates significantly and also reduced the wages of the district clerk and other council workers. By relinquishing the running of picture shows to an exhibitor, the Institute committee was not only guaranteed an income, but also that sound equipment could be installed at no cost.

The successful tender to run talkies in Snowtown was submitted by Bill Benbow of Benbow Amusements, a projector manufacturer and exhibitor based in Adelaide. He installed Shadowtone Talking Picture equipment, which, according to the local newspaper, was installed in over 30 venues in South Australia and was worth approximately £700 (Anon. 1932d: 2). Although installed permanently in the hall, the equipment remained Benbow's property. In November 1932, Benbow signed up to a five-year lease on the Memorial Hall and, as he had done in other districts, he specified that he would be responsible for booking the films from the distributors and for employing local residents as manager and projectionist. In return the Institute committee would receive a percentage of the takings (Jones 1978: 291). The Benbow arrangement guaranteed screenings every week and, as he dealt with several distributors, provided the Snowtown cinema-goer with a broader selection of films than was screened under the Paramount block package arrangement.

The price of a ticket to the Snowtown Institute Talkies, which included tax, was 2s 4d for the back seats and 1s 9d for the front seats with children prices at 1s 2d and 7d. These admission prices were considerable given that in 1933 the advertised price of a good brand tea was 2s 4d per pound, pork sausages 8d per pound, rabbits 6d each and cheese 8d per pound (Anon. 1933a: 24). In comparison to other rural picture shows such as at Burra and Tanunda, admission to the front seats of the Snowtown Institute Talkies was expensive. However, the greatest disparity was between these prices and the admission prices in city and suburban picture houses.

The city and suburban picture houses generally did not advertise their admission prices unless they had a special price. For example, a first-release house in the city would advertise a special price of a shilling for the morning sessions. The Grand in metropolitan Adelaide, which by 1933 was a move-over, second-release house for Greater Union Theatres, advertised its admission prices, including tax, as 1s 9d and 1s 2d for the dress circle and 1s 2d for the stalls. In the suburbs, only the Ozone chain advertised admission prices – 1s 9d (including tax) for the dress circle and 1s 2d (including tax) for the front stalls. (Their advertisements included the line 'we do not increase prices on Saturday nights', indicating that some suburban cinemas may have had a dual pricing structure.) Given

that those films that screened at both the Grand and Snowtown screened in Snowtown on average 37 weeks (and in one case 84 weeks) after opening at the Grand, cinema-going in Snowtown was certainly expensive. The lack of competing entertainment options in the small country town undoubtedly gave it a higher degree of pricing power.

The records of the takings for each screening for the two years from June 1933 to July 1935 provide an insight into the popularity of specific films. Screenings were generally double features and held on Saturday nights and on some occasions on both the Friday and Saturday night if the main feature was likely to draw a large crowd. Occasionally, Wednesday night screenings were held either because a star attraction was travelling through the area and was not otherwise available for a Saturday night screening, or because the Memorial Hall would be booked out by what the Institute committee considered a more important event, for example, the Church of England dance or the Methodist Cricket Fair. There were five screenings on a Monday night, mostly public holidays, and one on a Tuesday night (New Year's Day 1935) but Saturday night was the night for the large audiences.

State Records of South Australia holds the cashbook for the Snowtown Institute showing the amounts taken at the ticket box for the period April 1922 to June 1924. Comparing the data in these documents with the June 1933 to July 1935 data shows a contrast in cinema-going during the relative economic prosperity of the early 1920s and the depressed early 1930s and allows us to get a sense of the impact of the Depression on Australian rural audiences.

The low average takings per month for the 1922–23 financial year, shown in Figure 1 below, are possibly due to the time it took for regular cinema-going in Snowtown to be accepted. In November 1923 the average takings per month peaks at £17 and then remains in a range between £13 and £17 until June 1924, the beginning of winter. In comparison, the 1933–35 average takings per month never exceeded £12, with the exception of September 1933. This comparison shows the severe impact of the Depression on cinema-going in Snowtown resulting from families having to reconsider their spending priorities.

However, to attribute a drop in takings solely to a person's spending ability ignores other factors that determine an audience size. For example, the smallest audience to attend during the period of July 1933 to June 1935 was 63 for the double feature, *The Big Cage* (Neumann, 1933) and *It's Tough to be Famous* (Green, 1932) screened on 16 September 1933 taking only £5 1s 7d at the ticket box. *The Big Cage* was a recent release taking only fifteen weeks after its opening in Adelaide to be screened in Snowtown. So why did the screening at Snowtown result in poor takings? Snowtown received 63 points of rain the weekend these films were screened and the temperature was 63˚F (17.2˚C), which may have had an impact on audience attendance. (There are 100 points in one inch of rain.) The night of the screening was also the last night of the 1933 Royal Spring Show in Adelaide.

This example shows that there are no simple answers to cinema-going choices, but by testing possible explanatory factors such as genre, distributor, 'recency' of the film (that is, time elapsed between opening at a first-release house in the Adelaide Central Business District and screening at

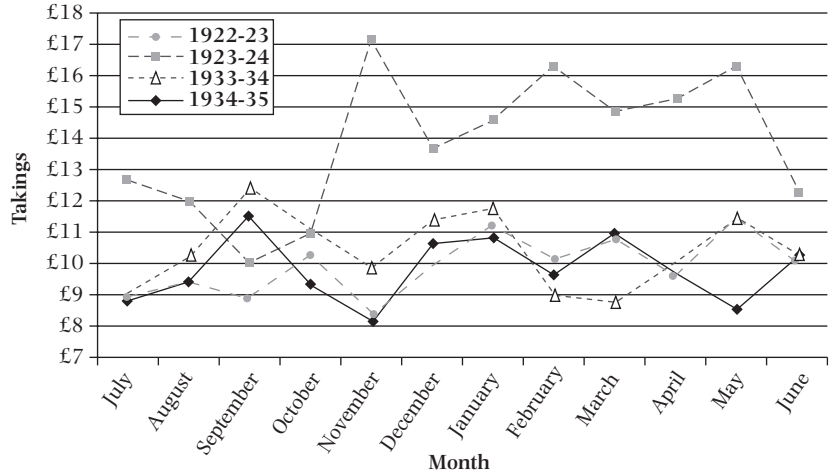


Figure 1: Monthly average takings – 1922–23, 1923–24, 1933–34 and 1934–35.

Snowtown), country of origin, local weather conditions and other competing events against ticket box receipts, an insight can be gained on the impact that the complex mixture of these factors have on the film preferences of the Snowtown cinema-goers.

Genre

To test if the genre of a film has an influence on the popularity of films screened at Snowtown in the study period, a genre has been allocated to each film based on the previews in *The Stanley Herald.* Where a film has not been previewed, or the genre has not been identified in the preview, the primary genre given in the IMDB.com website has been used. Of the 226 films screened, 71 (31%) were comedies and of the 114 main features, 27 (24%) were comedies. Drama was the next most frequently screened genre with 47 (21%) of both main and support features, and 26 (23%) main features, followed by musicals with 28 (12%) of both features and 25 (22%) main features. Comedies and musicals attracted an average audience size of 80 and drama 79 indicating that they had roughly equal appeal for Snowtown audiences. While the average audience size for the horror and romance genres were higher, the sample size of each of these is too small for drawing inferences.

Film distributors

Another hypothesis to investigate is that institutional factors might explain box office variability, with films from certain distributors being more popular or being advertised more widely or some combination of other factors. Of the 226 films screened at the Institute from July 1933 to June 1935, 218 films screened were distributed by eight main distributors. Universal and Paramount screened most of the films (35 and 34 respectively) followed by Greater Australasian Films (GAF) (30), Fox Films (29), MGM (28), Warner-First National (26), British Empire Films (BEF) (20) and RKO (16). With the exception of Fox Films, the main and support feature were not necessarily from the same distributor, suggesting that Benbow's arrangements with Fox were more controlled than with other distributors.

In determining Benbow's preference for distributors, concentrating on just main features makes the analysis less blurry. Paramount screened the most (18) followed by Universal and MGM (16 each) and Greater Australasian Films (15 each). Attributing the audience size to the main feature alone, Paramount rates first with 2,576 admissions, GAF next with 2,558, followed by BEF with 2,319 and MGM with 2,270. At a glance it would appear that Paramount films were more appreciated by the Snowtown audience than any other. However, the average audience size drawn by each distributor reveals a different picture. BEF films draw the largest average audience of 193 with an average takings of £7 18s 7d, followed by GAF with 170 (£7 16s 6d), Fox with 161 (£7 0s 9d), Paramount and Warner-First National with 143 (£6 7s 5d and £6 9s 11d respectively), MGM and RKO with 142 (£5 19s 2d and £6 11s 3d respectively) and Universal with the smallest average audience of 121 and the lowest average takings of £5 1s 10d. Benbow's preference for dealing with these distributors may be based on the speed with which he could obtain prints for screening at Snowtown believing that recent films would be an attraction. BEF specialized in British films and it may be for this reason that their films attracted the highest average audience and the highest average takings. Preference for films based on nationality is discussed later.

Snowtown Institute Talkies can be considered to be at the end of the film distribution chain in the mid-north region of South Australia. Those main features screened at Snowtown which were also screened in the nearby town of Clare, some 52 kilometres away, took an average of 24 weeks to arrive in Clare from the city. The equivalent time for Snowtown was 36 weeks. Main features screened at Snowtown distributed by Universal took an average of 25 weeks to arrive from the city. However, Benbow's decision to screen *The Sentimental Bloke* (Thring, 1932) some 124 weeks after its city debut distorts this average. With *The Sentimental Bloke* taken out of the equation, the average is reduced to 18 weeks. Yet these films only managed to attract an average audience of 121 to their screenings, the lowest of the eight main distributors. BEF films, which had the highest average audience and the highest average takings, took on average 42 weeks to reach Snowtown. This suggests that the recency of the release was not a major causal factor in explaining the popularity of films for Snowtown audiences.

There is no evidence that Bill Benbow had influence over the film distributors during this study period, 1933–35. Anecdotally, his influence was apparent in the late 1940s when his circuit was much larger. His lease on the town hall at Minlaton, a town some 150 kilometres southwest of Snowtown and similar in size to Snowtown, had expired. He was out-tendered by the Community Centre so he set up opposition in the Parish Hall a few metres down the road from the Town Hall. The new manager of the Town Hall pictures, Harry Porter, found it difficult to get films as he 'found the film suppliers bowing to the wishes of Benbow Amusements' (Cook 1975: 22).

Country of origin

Most of the films screened at Snowtown from July 1933 to June 1935 were produced in the United States. The 172 US films dwarf the 40 films from the United Kingdom and the 9 Australian productions. Of the 114 main features,

86 were produced in the United States, 19 in the United Kingdom and 7 in Australia. By allocating the takings evenly across main and support features, the total takings for US films screened was £1,094 averaging £6 7s 2d per film. While the gross takings for the 40 UK films screened was £326, the average per film of £8 3s 2d was 28 per cent higher than US films. Yet the largest average ticket box takings of £8 15s 11d was for Australian films compared to £6 7s 2d for films from the United States. Comparing only main features, the disparity is greater with Australian films averaging £9 0s 9d, UK films averaging £8 15s 7d and the US main features averaging the same as all US features, £6 7s 2d. This popularity is also reflected in audience size. The largest average audience of 211 for Australian films is significantly higher than an average audience of 141 for US productions. The number of US films screened at Snowtown during the study period was more likely to be due to the size and constancy of supply rather than simply quality or popularity.

The popularity of Australian films can also be measured by their prominence in the twenty most popular main features screened at Snowtown during the study period (see appendix). Australian films represent 6% of all main features screened at Snowtown during the study period yet represent 20% of the twenty most popular. Films from the United States represent 75% of all films screened and 50% of the top twenty main features. The other 30% were British productions.

If cinema-going in Snowtown is representative of rural cinema-going in South Australia, then the view about Australian films expressed by Dan Clifford, the largest suburban exhibitor in Adelaide, to the 1927 Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry was no longer valid by the mid-1930s. Asked if Australian films are really not good enough, Clifford replied 'one or two pictures have been successful, but generally speaking, they are very ordinary' (Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia 1927: 536). The popularity of Australian films in Snowtown may have been due to an improvement in the quality since the Royal Commission or that rural audience reception of Australian films may have differed significantly than that of city and suburban audiences.

Weather

Another explanatory thesis worth testing is that the content of films or the institutional arrangements were unimportant and that external factors such as weather might explain variations in attendance. There is no available data on the temperatures at Snowtown for the study period. As there is little variation between Snowtown and Adelaide temperatures, *The Advertiser's* weather reports for Adelaide have been used. Most picture shows (48) were screened in the temperature range of 60˚ to 90˚F, drawing an average audience size of 151, the same average audience size for the temperature ranges of 70˚ to 79˚ F and 80˚ to 89˚ F, suggesting that the optimum range in temperature for cinema-going in Snowtown is 60˚ to 89˚ F (16.8˚ to 34.2˚ C).

One would expect rainfall to affect cinema attendance in rural areas as at the time very few roads were bitumen, but this does not appear to be the case. There was no rainfall for 63 screenings and 1 to 20 points of rain for 25 screenings. The samples over 20 points of rain are too small and inconsistent to draw any conclusions. For example, 61 to 80 points range contains only one night's screening, the double feature, *The Big Cage* and

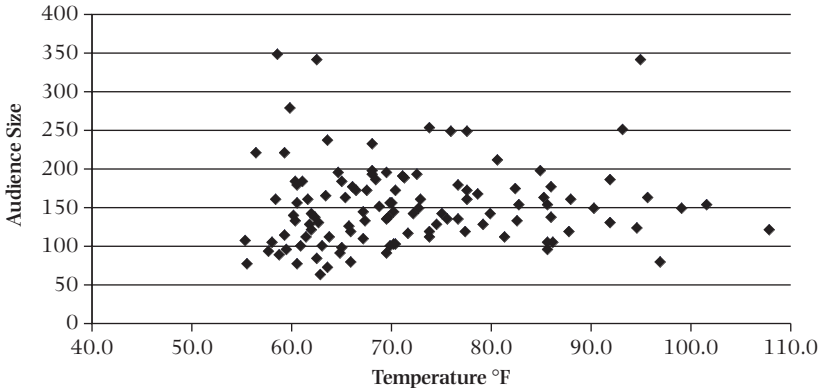


Figure 2: *Scatter plot of audience size against maximum temperature, July 1933 to June 1935.*

It's Tough to be Famous. It is difficult to ascertain if it was the 66 points of rain that weekend that was responsible for the low audience turnout of 63, considering that three weekends earlier 93 points of rain fell and 193 cinema-goers attended the double feature *Marry Me* (Thiele, 1932) and *The Painted Woman* (Blystone, 1932). There does not appear to be any correlation between wet weather and how many people ventured out to the Snowtown Institute Talkies. It could be that most of the cinema audience were from within the township rather than the outlying district.

The table below indicates that there is not much seasonal variation. Spring and summer 1933 are particularly high but each of those can be attributed to three star attractions. While winter 1933 is low, the 1934 winter had a higher average audience than autumn and spring.

While the data suggests that the optimum range in temperature for cinema-going in Snowtown is 60˚ to 89˚ F (see Figure 2 above), and that

	Season audience	**Average audience**	**Average temp. (˚F)**	**Average rainfall (points)**	**Average takings**
Winter 33 (2 months data only)	1220	136	60.8	11	£12 3s 10d
Spring 33	2383	159	68.6	6	£14 8s 1d
Summer 34	2365	169	83.2	1	£13 19s 10d
Autumn 34	2044	146	77.8	1	£12 14s 4d
Winter 34	2381	149	62.7	5	£12 16s 3d
Spring 34	1851	142	72.6	6	£12 18s 5d
Summer 35	2211	158	80.9	4	£13 12s 4d
Autumn 35	2169	145	71.9	9	£12 10s 0d

Table 1: Audience size and weather conditions, winter 1933 to autumn 1935.

Note: The average temperature and rainfall reflects screening nights only

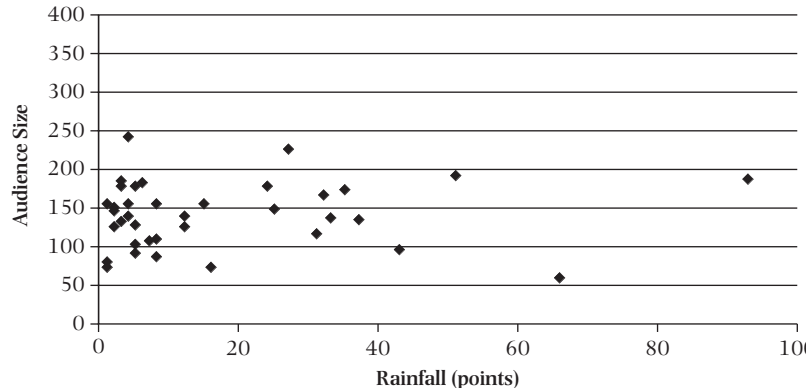


Figure 3: Scatter plot of audience size against rainfall, July 1933 to June 1935.

the audience numbers are up in summer, it does not indicate that the size of the audience is affected by rainfall.

Testing the assumptions against the ten films with the largest audience

Working through each of these possible explanatory factors separately yields no immediate result. To determine if there is a correlation between cinema attendance and some combination of the variables, it might be more useful to proceed inductively, testing the assumptions against the ten films screened at Snowtown from July 1933 to June 1935 that drew the largest audience.

Jack's the Boy (Forde, 1932) drew an audience of 347, the largest audience for any film screened at Snowtown during the study period. The single feature was screened over two nights, 1 and 2 September 1933, taking £6 11s 10d at the ticket box on the Friday night and £25 7s 6d on the Saturday night. There were only seven occasions when a screening took place on both the Friday and Saturday night and the Friday night's share of the audience was always low, averaging 66. Friday 1 September 1933 was a cold day with a maximum temperature of 55.9˚F (13.3˚C). The night would have been even colder, yet *Jack's the Boy* managed to draw an average size audience. The maximum temperature for the next day only reached 61.7˚F (16.5˚C) nevertheless this popular film drew a record audience of 280.

Jack's the Boy was a comedy with songs, the type of film that had the potential of lifting the spirits of a depressed rural community. The film's star, Jack Hulbert, described the film as a 'tough adventure and a hero doing mad things, but coming out on top in the end' (Low 1985: 132). *Jack's the Boy* was distributed by Greater Australasian Films whose films enjoyed an average audience size of 170 when screened in Snowtown, second highest to BEF. The film was British and therefore, based on the analysis, likely to draw a larger audience in Snowtown than a US production. *Jack's the Boy* screened in Snowtown just two weeks after screening in the nearby town of Clare. It then travelled west to be screened at Port Pirie for three nights before moving on to the Yorke Peninsula. It was unusual for Snowtown to screen a film soon after Clare and before Port Pirie so this could also have contributed to its popularity.

On Our Selection (Hall, 1932) screened as a double bill with *Central Park* (Adolfi, 1932) over two nights, 27 and 28 April 1934. The Friday night audience of 83 was the largest audience for any Friday night screening. On the Saturday night, 261 people attended the screening and the night's takings was £22 19s 8d.

The Saturday screening was on a cold autumn night when the day's temperature did not get higher than 61.6˚F (16.4˚C). So what was it about *On Our Selection* that coaxed people away from their hearth? The film was self-consciously Australian, with a grass-roots rural folk hero battling adversity. It was a film of the time drawing audiences in wherever it screened. It premiered in Brisbane in August 1932 and according to *Home* in its 1 June 1937 issue, 'it went on to screen continuously throughout Australia for the next three years' (Shirley and Adams 1983: 117). Given that the typical commercial life of a feature film in the 1930s was usually less than twelve months (Sedgwick 1998: 3), *On Our Selection* had an unusually long run. In describing what it was that struck a chord with the audiences, Shirley and Adams comment that Dad Rudd's 'talk about battling floods, drought, fires and foreclosure had a new relevance to Australians thrown back on their own resources' (Shirley and Adams 1983: 117). This was particularly so with rural audiences such as Snowtown. The three Australian films that are in the ten most popular films screened in Snowtown are all set in the bush. Films set in the city, such as *The Sentimental Bloke*, did not fair well at Snowtown.

Tell Me Tonight (Litvak, 1932), with the support feature *The King's Cup* (Cobham, 1933), attracted an audience of 319 over two nights, with 62 seeing the film on Friday 12 January 1934 and 257 on Saturday. Like *Jack's the Boy*, *Tell Me Tonight* was another British comedy with songs, distributed by GAF. It had enjoyed an unprecedented 12-week season at the Majestic Theatre in Adelaide and began its country screenings while still being screened at the Majestic. In the fourth week of its city release, *Tell Me Tonight* was screened at Broken Hill for six nights and in the ninth week it screened at Port Pirie and then Tanunda. Once the city season finished, the film was screened at Mount Gambier and Clare before it opened up on the suburban circuit. The same night as the suburban release Blyth Talkies at the Blyth Institute Hall screened the film. The significance of this is that Blyth was less than 30 kilometres by road from Snowtown and Blyth Talkies was a formidable competitor of Clare Talkies which operated at the Clare Town Hall. With only 13 kilometres separating the two towns, the Blyth and Clare picture shows vied with each other for an audience. Both of these picture shows tended to screen recent films and the Snowtown Institute Talkies could not afford to lose its audience to either picture show. Two days before the Blyth screening, an advertisement was cunningly placed in *The Stanley Herald* heralding *Tell Me Tonight* as coming soon, even though it would be another three months before it was screened at Snowtown. When it did screen at the Snowtown Institute Talkies it was 98.4˚F (36.9˚C) but the temperature did not deter the audience from seeing one of the most popular films of 1933. *Tell Me Tonight* ranked second in a newspaper survey of readers' ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933 (Waterman 1934: 45).

The Squatter's Daughter (Hall, 1933) was supported by *Little Orphan Annie* (Robertson, 1932) and drew an audience of 277 over two nights, with 69 at the Friday night screening of 29 June 1934 and 205 at the next night's screening. The Saturday was a cold day with the thermometer reaching just 57.7˚F (14.3˚C) which, taking into consideration the audience size of *Jack's the Boy* and *Tell Me Tonight*, suggests that temperature may not have any bearing on the number of people prepared to attend a popular film.

Although *The Squatter's Daughter* took 36 weeks from the release of the film in the city to its screening in Snowtown, it was seen in the rural and regional areas before the suburban release. The Mount Gambier Capitol and Millicent Globe screened *The Squatter's Daughter* in the week between the end of its four-week run at West's, the first-release theatre in the city, and the opening night at the Grand, the second-release theatre. The Mount Gambier Capitol took advantage of the currency of the film with large advertisements in the local press proclaiming 'coming by special aeroplane from West's'.

The Squatter's Daughter was a drama, the second most common genre with the Snowtown audiences, and distributed by BEF whose films drew the largest average Snowtown audience. But its popularity was probably more to do with it being an Australian film, not set in an unfamiliar city, and having an optimism much needed at that time. The film struck a chord with rural audiences and it was exactly what an anxious, Depression-affected community wanted to see: a tribute to the sheep industry set in familiar landscape with characters overcoming any obstacle that may confront them. *The Squatter's Daughter* ranked third in a newspaper survey of readers' ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933 (Waterman 1934: 45).

Cavalcade (Lloyd, 1933) was the fifth most popular film screened at Snowtown and the Academy Award-winning film probably could have drawn a bigger audience than the 253 that attended had it been screened on a Saturday night rather than Wednesday 27 September 1933. *Cavalcade*, distributed by Fox Films, 'was one of the 11 top grossing films of 1933' (Fetrow 1992: 93) and it was screened at Snowtown with another Fox Film, *Walking Down Broadway* (Von Stroheim, 1933) which has been described as a box office dud (Fetrow 1992: 271).

Cavalcade had an interesting journey through the picture house circuit in South Australia. It ran at West's from 27 May to 30 June 1933 and, prior to moving on to Union Theatres second-release house, the Grand, it screened in the country at Tanunda and Gawler. It did not screen at either of the Star or Ozone theatres in the suburbs or country centres. Some light as to why it was not screened by these chains is contained in a letter from the South Australian Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association to the Chief Secretary dated 6 February 1934. The association was expressing concern that 'a concerted move is being made by General Theatres which is know as the Combine, to gain full control of the business throughout Australia' claiming:

> During the past twelve months or so the Combine has increased their protection period from two or three weeks to four and six weeks, and in the

case of the feature 'Cavalcade' the protection period was three months. It is obvious that this is at the expense of our Members.

(SRSA GRG67/33/1934/107)

It appears that the Ozone and Star chains and other exhibitors who were members of the South Australian Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association boycotted the film. Those travelling picture showmen with mobile units (Lester's Talkies and Cleve Talkies) managed to hire the film for exhibition in remote towns just six months after it opened in the city. It was unprecedented for towns as remote as Denial Bay on the west coast to be seeing an Academy Award-winning film so soon after its city release. *Cavalcade* was screened at Snowtown two months after it finished at the Grand and before it was screened at independent suburban picture houses. This would have contributed significantly to its popularity among the Snowtown population. The weather was not too cold reaching 73.9˚F (23.3˚C) during the day and *Cavalcade* was of the second most frequently screened genre, drama. Although it is not a British film, it is a film about Britain and British history. *Cavalcade* ranked first in a newspaper survey of readers' ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933 (Waterman 1934: 45).

Yes, Mr Brown (Buchanan, 1933), a British musical, was just as popular as *Cavalcade* and also screened mid-week. While the number of tickets sold was three less than *Cavalcade*, the takings were a lot less, £21 10s 6d compared to £24 4s 9d, due to the audience comprising of more children and the adults opting for the less expensive seats. The temperature was a hot 93.3˚F (34˚C) on 24 January 1934, the day *Yes, Mr Brown* was screened at Snowtown but, as with *Tell Me Tonight*, the hot weather did not appear to deter people from going to the pictures.

Yes, Mr Brown doubled with another British film, the comedy *Up for the Derby* (MacLean Rogers, 1933). A British musical doubled with a British comedy distributed through GAF and screened two months after finishing on the suburban circuit are the qualities that would attract a large Snowtown audience.

The Sign of the Cross (De Mille, 1932) was another film screened on two nights at the Snowtown Institute on 20 and 21 October 1933. It premiered in Adelaide at the Rex Theatre on 22 July 1933 and, according to a newspaper advertisement, 26,349 people had seen the film in the first three weeks it had screened at the Rex (Anon. 1933b: 2). Its first screenings in country South Australia was at the Kadina Ideal on 24 August 1933 and the following week at the Mount Gambier Capitol. Both of these cinemas were a part of D. Clifford Ltd's Star circuit, the largest of the Adelaide suburban chains. The film took five weeks to screen throughout the suburban cinema circuit, which would account for the relative speed with which it reached Snowtown.

The Sign of the Cross became a favourite for screenings on Christmas Day and Good Friday beyond 1933. Under the Places of Public Entertainment Act, a film exhibitor had to apply for a permit to screen on

Christmas Day or Good Friday. The Inspector would check to ensure that the film was suitable to be screened on these days. The Act did not specify what genre of film was or was not suitable, but in the cases where a screenings were not approved it was because the film was either a comedy or musical. Exhibitors screening films with a religious theme were guaranteed approval, and two years after its release, *The Sign of the Cross* was still being screened on Good Friday.

Of the 248 patrons who saw *The Sign of the Cross* at the Snowtown Institute, 182 saw it on the Saturday night when the weather was a pleasant 81.4˚F (27.4˚C). It was screened as a single feature and took £22 13s 10d at the ticket box over the two nights. According to one rural exhibitor who screened the film three months after Snowtown, the cost of hiring the film was enormous (Anon. 1934: 2), so Benbow would have been confident of a good size audience at Snowtown Institute even though a lot of people would have been attending the Clare Show on that Saturday. *The Sign of the Cross* was distributed by Paramount and of the Paramount features screened at Snowtown during the study period, this was by far the most popular. In a newspaper survey of readers' ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933, *The Sign of the Cross* ranked fourth (Waterman 1934: 45).

Sleepless Nights (Bentley, 1932) was the main feature supported by *Mr Bill the Conqueror* (Walker, 1932) when it screened at the Snowtown Institute on 23 December 1933. It had all the ingredients to be a successful film in Snowtown; musical comedy, British, distributed by BEF and the temperature was a fine 77.6˚F (25.3˚C) on the day it screened. Just as many people who saw *The Sign of the Cross* over two nights attended the one night screening of *Sleepless Nights* but the takings were slightly lower at £22 1s 7d as more adults opted for the cheaper seats.

The Hayseeds (Smith, 1933) supported by a B-grade comedy, *Peach O'Reno* (Seiter, 1931) screened over two nights on 31 August and 1 September 1934. It opened in Adelaide on 23 December 1933 running for two weeks at West's and prior to moving on to Greater Union's second-release house, the Grand, it screened in Clare. Screening in nearby Clare eight months before the Snowtown screening did not appear to affect the size of the Snowtown audience with 236 people paying a total of £17 14s 4d at the ticket box. As with *On Our Selection* and *The Squatter's Daughter*, *The Hayseeds* struck a chord with the Snowtown audience with its rural location and its central character, although comedic, rising above adversity. It was screened on a wintry cold night when the daytime temperature did not rise above 58.8˚F (14.9˚C).

Paddy, The Next Best Thing (Lachman, 1933) was the tenth most popular film screened at the Snowtown Institute Talkies in the period from July 1933 to June 1935. Screened on 2 June 1934, with the support *Uptown New York* (Schertzinger, 1932), the ticket box takings was £20 7s 2d from an audience of 231. The film, a musical comedy, was distributed by Fox and it was screened on a reasonably pleasant night for winter with the day temperature reaching 68.2˚F (20.1˚C) and 27 points (7mm) of rain falling. In a newspaper survey of readers' ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933, *Paddy, The Next Best Thing* ranked fifth (Waterman 1934: 45).

Conclusion

The analysis of the Snowtown data has provided an insight into the cinema-going preferences of one rural town in the early 1930s and factors that may marginally affect audience size, but gives no simple explanation of an individual film's relative popularity. While inclement weather does not appear to have impeded the weekly pilgrimage to the Snowtown Institute Talkies, there appears to be a pattern of success with British comedies or musicals or with contemporary Australian films set in the bush. The time taken for a film to reach Snowtown after its city release was not necessarily a consideration – the film with the second highest ticket box takings, *On Our Selection*, took 83 weeks while the film with the fifth lowest takings, *Handy Andy* (Butler, 1934) was screened at Snowtown in the same week as its city release. This is further demonstrated by films distributed by Universal taking on average 18 weeks to reach Snowtown from their city release and drawing an average audience well below films distributed by BEF whose films took on average 42 weeks to reach Snowtown.

The analysis of the Snowtown data shows a decline from September 1934 in features which would attract a large audience with the monthly takings dropping to £32 15s 6d in November 1934, the lowest in the two-year period. The Snowtown Institute's arrangement with Bill Benbow meant that they were guaranteed a percentage of these takings for no outlay other than to make the hall available for the screenings. For Benbow, the arrangement freed him from the worry of the overheads associated with maintaining a venue and gave him the advantage of seeing how a film went in the city and the suburbs before it arrived at Snowtown. Such arrangements made screening films in rural and regional towns viable and ensured the survival of the rural picture show through the harshest years of the Depression. If Snowtown is representative of other rural and regional towns in South Australia, there appears to be a strong culture of cinema-going firmly entrenched that also ensured the survival of film exhibition through the economically depressed 1930s.

References

Anon. (1897), 'The Cinematographe', *The Borderwatch*, 23 January, p. 2.

—— (1913), 'Adelaide Notes', *Australian Kinematograph Journal*, 31 July, p. 14.

—— (1922a), 'Snowtown Pictures', *The Stanley Herald*, 23 March, p. 2.

—— (1922b), 'Snowtown Institute', *The Stanley Herald*, 27 April, p. 2.

—— (1922c), 'Snowtown Institute – Annual Report', *The Stanley Herald*, 27 July, p. 2.

—— (1923), 'Institute Pictures', *The Stanley Herald*, 25 January, p. 2.

—— (1932a), 'Yorketown Talkies', *Southern Yorke Peninsula Pioneer*, 8 January, p. 3.

—— (1932b), 'Snowtown Institute – Annual Meeting', *The Stanley Herald*, 28 July, p. 2.

—— (1932c), Tenders and Contracts Column, *The Advertiser*, 26 August, p. 4.

—— (1932d), 'Snowtown to Have Talkies', *The Stanley Herald*, 3 November, p. 2.

—— (1933a), Central Provision Stores Advertisement, *The Advertiser*, 10 November, p. 24.

—— (1933b), Rex Theatre Advertisement, *The Advertiser*, 12 August, p. 2.

—— (1934), Globe Talkies Advertisement, *The South Eastern Times*, 19 January, p. 2.

Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (1936–1940), *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933*, Canberra: Commonwealth Government Printer.

Cook, D. (1975), *The Striding Years: A History of the Minlaton District Council Area*, publisher unknown.

Fetrow, A.G. (1992), *Sound Films, 1927–1939: A United States Filmography*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Jones, A. (1978), *Snowtown: the First Century 1878–1978*, Snowtown Centenary Committee.

Low, R. (1985), *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, London: George Allen & Unwin.

Noye, R.J. (2003), *Talking History: Tales of Clare S.A.*, Clare: Clare Regional History Group Inc.

Pike, A and Cooper, R. (1980), *Australian Film 1900–1977*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia (1927), *Minutes of Evidence*, Canberra: Government Printer.

Sedgwick, J. (1998), 'Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s', in J. Richards (ed.), *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929–1939*, London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 1–35.

Shirley, G. and Adams, B. (1983), *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty* Years, Sydney: Angus & Robertson Publishers and Currency Press.

Tulloch, J. (1982), *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin.

Walker, D. (1996), *Adelaide's Silent Nights: A Pictorial History of Adelaide's Picture Theatres During the Silent Era 1896–1929*, Canberra: National Film and Sound Archive.

Walsh, M. (1999), 'The Years of Living Dangerously: Sound Comes to Australia', in D. Verhoeven (ed.), *Twin Peaks: Australian and New Zealand Films*, Melbourne: Damned Publishing, pp. 69–83.

Waterman, E. (1934), 'The S.A. Suburbs Speak: How Adelaide Shows Fought Through the Depression', *Everyones*, 12 December, pp. 44–45.

State Records of South Australia (SRSA)

State Records of South Australia, GRG58/256/0/12, papers relating to Snowtown Institute, various dates.

—— GRG67/33/1922/108, letter from W.A. Turner to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, 28 August 1928.

—— GRG67/33/1925/63, Operator's Licence – G.E. Francis, Snowtown, 17 June 1925.

—— GRG67/33/1929/231, letter from Percy M. Wells to the Chief Secretary, 25 January 1932, and letter from Under Secretary to Percy M. Wells, 20 August 1937.

—— GRG67/33/1930/1, letter from Under Secretary to American Vice Consul, 3 January 1930.

—— GRG67/33/1930/37, police report from Tumby Bay Police Station, 20 July 1932.

—— GRG67/33/1933/108, letter from Denial Bay Hall to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, undated (circa 1933).

—— GRG67/33/1933/112, letter from Mount Hope Hall to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, undated (circa 1933).

—— GRG67/33/1933/115, letter from Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to the Secretary of Calca Public Hall, 10 August 1933.

—— GRG67/33/1933/120, letter from the Secretary of Yeelanna Hall to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, 19 July 1933.

—— GRG67/33/1933/164, minute from Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to Chief Secretary, 2 November 1933.

—— GRG67/33/1934/107, letter from South Australian Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association to the Chief Secretary, 6 February 1934.

Appendix: Top 20 Screenings at the Snowtown Institute Talkies by Audience Size (July 1933 to June 1935)

The material is arranged as follows:
Audience Size, Takings (including tax), Screening Date(s), Temperature (˚F)
Billing, **Title** (Director, Year), Genre, Distributor, Country of Origin, Weeks since released in Adelaide CBD

347, £31 19s 4d, 1 & 2 September 1933, 55.9˚ & 61.7˚
Single Bill: **Jack's the Boy** (Forde, 1932), Comedy, GAF, UK, 28

341, £29 17s 11d, 27 & 28 April 1934, 63.8˚ & 61.6˚
Main Feature: **On Our Selection** (Hall, 1932), Comedy, BEF, Australia, 83
Support Feature: **Central Park** (Adolfi, 1932), Crime, First National, USA, 31

319, £29 1s 7d, 12 & 13 January 1934, 91.5˚ & 98.4˚
Main Feature: **Tell Me Tonight** (Litvak, 1932), Comedy, GAF, UK, 28
Support Feature: **The King's Cup** (Cobham, 1933), Drama, GAF, UK, 23

277, £23 10s 9d, 29 & 30 June 1934, 62.7˚ & 57.7˚
Main Feature: **The Squatter's Daughter** (Hall, 1933), Drama, BEF, Australia, 36
Support Feature: **Little Orphan Annie** (Robertson, 1932), Comedy, RKO, USA, 64

253, £24 4s 9d, 27 September 1933, 73.9˚
Main Feature: **Cavalcade** (Lloyd, 1933), Drama, Fox, USA, 18
Support Feature: **Walking Down Broadway** (Von Stroheim, 1933), Comedy, Fox, USA, 17

250, £21 10s 6d, 24 January 1934, 93.3˚
Main Feature: **Yes, Mr Brown** (Buchanan, 1933), Musical, GAF, UK, 18
Support Feature: **Up for the Derby** (Rogers, 1933), Comedy, GAF, UK, 18

248, £22 13s 10d, 20 & 21 October 1933, 81.4˚
Single Bill: **The Sign of the Cross** (De Mille, 1932), Drama, Paramount, USA, 46

248, £22 1s 7d, 23 December 1933, 77.6˚
Main Feature: **Sleepless Nights** (Bentley, 1932), Musical, BEF, UK, 60
Support Feature: **Mr Bill the Conqueror** (Walker, 1932), Romance, BIP, UK, 39

236, £19 15s 6d, 31 August & 1 September 1934, 63.7˚ & 58.8˚
Main Feature: **The Hayseeds** (Smith, 1933), Comedy, BEF, Australia, 36

Support Feature: **Peach O'Reno** (Seiter, 1931), Comedy, RKO, USA, 104

231, £20 7s 2d, 2 June 1934, 68.2˚
Main Feature: **Paddy, the Next Best Thing** (Lachman, 1933), Musical, Fox, USA, 22
Support Feature: **Uptown New York** (Schertzinger, 1932), Romance, World Wide Films, USA, 47

219, £19 9s 1d, 22 July 1933, 59.5˚
Main Feature: **Tess of the Storm Country** (Santell, 1932), Drama, Fox, USA, 14
Support Feature: **The Painted Woman** (Blystone, 1932), Drama, Fox, USA, 37

219, £23 8s 5d, 15 August 1934, 56.6˚
Main Feature: **Damaged Lives** (Ulmer, 1933), Drama, 11, Weldon, Canada/USA, 11
Support Feature: **Doss House** (Baxter, 1933), Crime, Baxter & Barter, UK, city release not known

211, £16 13s 1d, 12 May 1934, 80.8˚
Main Feature: **Adorable** (Dieterle, 1933), Musical, Fox, USA, 33
Support Feature: **Frontier Marshal** (Seiler, 1934), Western, Fox, USA, 19

197, £16 18s 4d, 8 December 1934, 68.2˚
Main Feature: **Silence of Dean Maitland** (Hall, 1934), Drama, Cinesound, Australia, 24
Support Feature: **Hawley's of High Street** (Bentley, 1933), Comedy, BEF, UK, 31

197, £17 7s 1d, 19 January 1935, 85.0˚
Main Feature: **Only Yesterday** (Stahl, 1933), Drama, Universal, USA, 17
Support Feature: **Uncertain Lady** (Freund, 1934), Comedy, Universal, USA, 17

194, £17 7s 0d, 26 May 1934, 69.6˚
Main Feature: **42nd Street** (Bacon, 1933), Musical, First National, USA, 42
Support Feature: **You Said a Mouthful** (Bacon, 1932), Comedy, First National, USA, 37

194, £17 2s 5d, 15 September 1934, 64.9˚
Main Feature: **Peg O'My Heart** (Leonard, 1933), Drama, MGM, USA, 49
Support Feature: **The Pride of the Force** (Lee, 1933), Comedy, BEF, UK, 36

193, £18 4s 0d, 26 August 1933, 68.3˚
Main Feature: **Marry Me** (Thiele, 1932), Comedy, GAF, UK, city release not known
Support Feature: **The Painted Woman** (Blystone, 1932), Drama, Fox, USA, 42

192, £16 14s 3d, 4 November 1933, 72.7˚
Main Feature: **Rio Rita** (Reed, 1929), Musical, RKO, USA, 11
Support Feature: **Dance, Fools, Dance** (Beaumont, 1931), Crime, MGM, USA, city release not known

189, £16 9s 0d, 29 December 1934, 71.3°

Main Feature:	**The Desert Song** (Del Ruth, 1929), Musical, First National, USA, 6
Support Feature:	**She Learned About Sailors** (Marshall, 1934), Comedy, RKO, USA, 20

188, £16 10s 2d, 7 October 1933, 71.5°

Main Feature:	**The Maid of the Mountains** (Lane, 1932), Musical, BEF, UK, 31
Support Feature:	**Harmony Row** (Thring, 1933), Comedy, Universal, Australia, 22

186, £15 11s 6d, 12 January 1935, 92.0°

Main Feature:	**The Mystery of the Wax Museum** (Curtiz, 1933), Horror, First National, USA, 29
Support Feature:	**Son of a Sailor** (Bacon, 1933), Comedy, First National, USA, 23

Suggested citation

Walker, D. (2007), 'Rural cinema audiences in South Australia in the 1930s', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 353–375. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.353/1

Contributor details

Dylan Walker is a screen studies doctoral student at Flinders University researching film distribution and exhibition in rural South Australia during the 1930s. His book *Adelaide's Silent Nights*, published in 1996, dealt with the history of picture houses in South Australia during the silent era. Contact: Screen Studies Department, Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide 5001, SA, Australia.
E-mail: sacinema@hotmail.com

intellectjournals

The Soundtrack

ISSN 1751-4193

Aims and Scope

This journal focuses its attention on the aural elements which combine with moving images. It regards the sounds which accompany the visuals not as a combination of disparate disciplines, but as a unified and coherent entity. It assumes that irrespective of the industrial determinants, the soundtrack is perceived as a continuum by the audience; that music, dialogue, effects and atmospheres are instruments in the sonification of the film, analogous perhaps to the strings, brass, woodwinds and percussion in an orchestra.

The journal is rigorous academically yet accessible to all interested readers. Its editorial board includes: Rick Altman, Haim Bresheeth, John Broomhall, Michael Chanan, Michel Chion, Ian Christie, Gustavo Costantini, Ian Cross, Claudia Gorbman, Walter Murch, Roberto Perpignani, Gianluca Sergi, Sean Street, Randy Thom and Elisabeth Weis.

Free E-access

Intellect offers free access to all our journals in electronic form to users in institutions where there is a library subscription to the print version of that journal.

Subscribing

TS is published three times per year. Contact us for a subscription order form: Intellect, PO Box 862, Bristol, BS99 1DE, UK.

Current subscription rates are:
£30 (personal) / £210 (institutional)
(Postage is free within the UK, £5 in the EU and £10 outside the EU.)

Advertising Enquiries and bookings should be addressed to: Journals Manager, Intellect, PO Box 862, Bristol BS99 1DE, UK.

ISSN 1751–4193 / Three issues
Print & full electronic access

Studies in Australasian Cinema Volume 1 Number 3 © 2007 Intellect Ltd
Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.377/1

Cinema, community and policy: contexts and pretexts for the Regional Cinema Program in New South Wales, Australia

Karen Crowe *University of Wollongong*

Abstract

This article examines developments relating to regional cinema-going in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW). It draws on research whose primary case studies comprise four campaigns to revitalize historic cinema spaces in country towns in NSW and the introduction in the late 1990s of a Regional Cinema Program (RCP) designed to promote and support such activity in that state. It examines some of the historic and political contexts that precipitated these projects and the adoption of their concerns by the NSW state government and will consider how claims for the social importance of cinema-going have been reflected and constructed through the practices and discourses of policy-making and place-making. In particular, the essay traces the adoption of regional cinema access as a policy concern of the NSW state government and the aspirations and operations of a 'community cinema' in the south-western NSW town of Tumut. In focusing on this case study the article explores the interconnected relationship between trends in social and cultural policy-making, rural revitalization, the social experience of cinema-going and their various roles in the complex and contested construction of a sense of 'community'.

Keywords

New South Wales
regional cinema-going
rural revitalization
cultural policy
community cinema
NSW Regional Cinema Program

> Regional disintegration was a primary discourse at the time – banks and post offices were rationalizing and withdrawing services – so in policy terms it was important to find ways to build up regional communities.
>
> (Jane Smith, chief executive officer, NSW Film and Television Office, 10 August 2006)

Introduction

In the late 1990s the NSW government announced a unique cultural policy initiative. The Regional Cinema Program (RCP), established to promote and support localized cinema activity in non-metropolitan NSW, was launched to great fanfare. The RCP represented a remarkable departure from conventional cinema policy by an Australian government. For virtually the first time in the history of the Australian film industry, cinema exhibition subsidy was enthusiastically adopted as a responsibility of the state. Film policy initiatives in Australia are ordinarily concerned with the health of the national production industry. Indeed, it could be said that the exhibition sector has been regarded with some suspicion by policy-makers focused on the production industry, given that Australia's

theatres have traditionally provided such a hospitable environment for the national industry's major foreign 'competitor', Hollywood. Almost without exception, exhibition constitutes the sector of the Australian film industry traditionally subject to the least government support.[1]

What relevant factors precipitated the NSW government's extraordinary policy initiative and what pretexts were employed to successfully persuade policy-makers – and taxpayers – of its value? The mid- to late 1990s constituted a period of increasing discursive anxiety about economic and social sustainability in regional Australia. If a combination of practical issues – including a protracted drought, the decline of traditional industries, a population drain and the withdrawal of public services – formed the bases of these concerns, the reasons for their rhetorical amplification in the public arena were largely political. Significantly, these anxieties led to public policies focused on sustainability and community-building in rural and regional Australia and were accompanied by an increasing faith in the abilities of social and cultural policy-making to deliver such outcomes.

In terms of the RCP, this emphasis on sustainability and community-building was translated into cultural policy rhetoric that addressed processes of cinema preservation and place-making and invoked the potential of the cinema to advance social well-being. Preservationists, cultural administrators and policy-makers alike made strategic use of discourses of rural decline to promote social and cultural initiatives, asserting their ability to serve the aims of sustainability and revitalization. In particular, the RCP was argued around the idea of 'community', in terms that emphasized its capacity to be constructed or enhanced through revitalization of the spaces and practices of cinema-going.

This research study into the regional cinema revival in NSW is aligned with an emerging, more general shift in cinema studies away from a primary interest in textual analysis toward the social experiences of the cinema audience (Fuller 1996; Jancovich, Faire with Stubbings 2003; Tomsic 2004; Waller 2002). New parameters are being suggested by scholars who explicitly argue for the expansion of the discipline to include social factors that impact on cinema-going decisions and experiences (Allen 2006; Maltby 2006). While the focus of much of this research is historic, more fluid parameters clearly encourage multidisciplinarity and on this basis an expanded investigative agenda would encompass research into contemporary cinema restoration and usage (Jones 2003), as well as the social and economic analyses of cinema-going from the perspective of social and cultural geography (Hubbard 2000). A productive affiliation between the interests and conventions of cinema studies, cultural studies and cultural and social geographies suggests the importance of exploring the discursive production of 'community' through the spaces and practices of cinema-going at the level of lived experience.

The policy context: discourses of regional decline

In the mid-1990s a perceptible shift in public attitudes toward rural Australia occurred. The election of a surprising number of independents, including Pauline Hanson, in rural and regional seats in the 1996 federal election had a transformative effect on urban as well as rural populations.

1. Australia has no system equivalent to the UK Film Council regional film theatres; previous Australian Film Institute theatres (which were indirectly and briefly subsidized by government) were located in capital cities but in the early 2000s the AFI was stripped of all government subsidy for its touring exhibition and distribution services. Some national exhibition programmes are subsidized such as the current Australian Film Commission rural screening initiatives including the Big Screen festival and the Regional Digital Screen Network, although unlike the NSW RCP, these retain the traditional film agency focus on exhibition of Australian products and are principally curatorial initiatives. Major film festivals in capital cities also usually receive some government subsidy.

The unexpected destabilization of non-metropolitan political loyalties and the popularity of the One Nation party focused political and media attention on non-metropolitan issues and constituents, delivering them a renewed political potency and platform. The message was that rural and regional Australia was in crisis, with emotive media coverage inflaming concerns about the disintegration of community fabric. This comment, from a story headed 'Heart Ripped out of Country Towns', was typical: 'Communities across NSW are battling for their existence as rural Australia continues to reel from an economic restructuring which has gutted jobs, stripped away services and forced families and young people from the bush' (Jopson 1999: 4). Geographers McManus and Pritchard (2000: 384) identify this period as a turning point for what had been a previously existing urban focus in policy and funding programmes. Instead, a city/country dichotomy commonly framed discussions of rural disintegration, and these rhetorical frustrations with declining rural services and opportunities were effectively applied to cinema: 'People in rural and regional areas do not have the same level of access to arts and culture that their city counterparts enjoy. "In cinemas everywhere" doesn't mean it's on anywhere near most people in country New South Wales' (Vincent 2006: 6). These issues of 'access' and 'equity' have played a central role in the NSW government's attempts to revive country cinema culture. The RCP exemplifies a policy response that responds directly to the rhetorical tropes of a perceived regional crisis by supporting the restoration of a service (cinema screenings) which had become more commonly associated with city living, and which appealed to the desirable demographic groups of families and youth. More generally, the development of the RCP corresponded with other trends common in policy-making of the time: an increased appreciation of the value of social and cultural robustness, and the practical and conceptual enhancement of 'community'.

Social and cultural policy-making as an agent of revitalization

The elevation of social concerns in policy-making related specifically to the perception of a regional crisis but also reflected the adoption of 'triple-bottom-line' philosophies in policy-making generally during this period. The triple-bottom-line theory proposed an interrelationship between social, environmental and economic factors in public planning (Elkington 1998) and was observed by policy analysts to be a dominant theme in much of the policy rhetoric of regional development and planning of the 1990s (Reddel 2002: 52). This evident intersection between triple-bottom-line policy approaches and community concerns as expressed in discourses of regional decline encouraged regional policy-makers to conclude that the problems born of seemingly irrevocable environmental and economic situations could at least be alleviated through attention to social well-being.

In addition to this focus on social well-being in cultural policy-making was an accompanying ascendance of ideas and values concerning 'community, localism and citizen participation' (Reddel 2002: 50). These ideas have recently become prominent within policy literature, and are variously expressed in terms such as 'social capital', 'social entrepreneurship', 'community-building' and 'community regeneration and renewal' (Kenyon and Black 2001; Cavaye 2000; Stephens 2001; NSW Government n.d.).

The use of the terms 'capital' and 'entrepreneurship' is significant: the growing appeal of community is significantly boosted by the promise of economic advantage. This expression of essentially unquantifiable social concerns in economic terms promotes an asset-based understanding, situating social activity within an economic framework useful for the justification of policy and funding decisions. Policy developments such as these were especially fruitful for cinema revitalization projects, which boasted aspirations of economic development, place-based regeneration, active citizenship and social well-being aligned with the promise of enhanced community sustainability.

These aspirations, correlating the proposed benefits of cultural planning with discourses of sustainability and economic prosperity were received enthusiastically by governance agencies in the form of cultural policy theories (Mills 2003: 7–9). Just as Elkington's triple bottom line expanded the concerns of public governance beyond the economic to include environmental and social components, Jon Hawkes's *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* (2001) argued that 'culture' should be included as an essential component of public planning. Perhaps the most influential text spruiking this cultural revolution is Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class, and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (2002),[2] which links creativity and culture to place-based industrial, and therefore economic, regeneration. It is important to recognize that while Hawkes and Florida have become popular ambassadors for these ideas, their connections between culture, place-making and community-building were already present in policy and governance planning prior to publication of their respective texts, and at the same time that the RCP was being developed, as demonstrated by the 1997 Australia Council publication of *Better Places, Richer Communities: Cultural Planning and Local Development – A Practical Guide* (1997).

However the wide influence of these ideas in Australian public planning is indicated by references to *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* and *The Rise of the Creative Class* in a variety of governance and policy documents in the cultural field (see, for example, South Australia's Strategic Plan Audit Committee 2006: 64; NSW Ministry for the Arts and NSW Department of Local Government 2004: 20; Mills 2005: 1). Moreover, their influence is not limited to policy contexts. In the course of my regional cinema research a wide range of people in community, cultural administration and local governance roles cited both Hawkes and Florida in support of restoration projects.[3] Not all interpreted the texts accurately – for example, many equated 'culture' with 'the arts', rather than adopting the distinction made explicit by Hawkes – however, all presented an understanding of the idea that cultural activity can enhance social well-being and foster economic development. Comments made by local governance representatives in all four of this project's case study locations accepted the notion that cultural activities and facilities can make a location more attractive to existing and potential residents, and therefore to industry. These assumptions underpin the discourses of regional decline and sustainability amongst members of country towns seeking cinema restoration projects and evidence to support this observation appears in the discussion of fieldwork below. For some, the rhetoric of social well-being and economic

2. Florida's text has been given a difficult reception in academic circles (Gibson and Klocker 2005).

3. These included artists, preservation campaigners, arts administrators and local council representatives including cultural development workers, economic development managers and general managers.

advancement has been used to support their investment in cultural activities; for others, supporting cultural projects was a pathway to the perceived benefits of social well-being and economic development. Whatever their primary objective, cultural policy-makers, local administrators, community members and arts practitioners alike have embraced the elevation of creativity and culture sufficiently for this development in public planning to be tagged a 'cultural turn' (Gibson and Klocker 2005: 93).

Intersection of policy contexts: regional, social and cultural

The interlacing of regional, social and cultural policy-making philosophies with the aspiration of community sustainability has made inroads at all levels of government. In 2006 the then federal Minister for the Arts and Sport, Rod Kemp, affirmed a number of outcomes of a national regional arts summit including:

> That the centrality of the arts to sustainability be recognized: The arts in regional communities need to be recognized for their capacity to contribute to social capital, promote belonging, assist when populations are changing and help to build and strengthen regional communities.
>
> (Anon. 2006: 4)

In 1998 the long-established Arts Council of New South Wales (Macdonnell 1997) was restructured and renamed Regional Arts New South Wales (RANSW), with a recommended scaling down of focus to local government advocacy and community cultural development (Gzell 2001: 1).[4] The community-centred emphasis of these aspirations reflected the new focus on the application and meaning of policy at the level of local government, demonstrated by the 1998 requirement for local councils to prepare a social or community plan at least once every five years: 'local government is best placed to take the lead in local cultural planning and development' (NSW Ministry for the Arts and NSW Department of Local Government 2004: 6–9). Further, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported a significant increase in local government expenditure on cultural development, from $AUD 242.1 million in 2001–02 to $AUD 897.7 million in 2004–05, of which over one-third was provided by NSW councils (ABS 2006). The emphasis at all levels was on localized, place-based, community-driven activity.

NSW Regional Cinema Program

Administratively, these NSW government agencies and services provided the crucial framework and climate of support for the proposals and precedents that led to the establishment of the RCP in 1998. In 1996, the regional arts development officer (RADO)[5] for the North West region of NSW prepared a *Report on Regional Cinema* (Ritchie 1996) making a case for the re-establishment of cinema in regional NSW. Adopting discourses of regional decline the Report identified a series of difficulties facing regional NSW due to 'droughts, closure of industries, depressed commodity prices and declining employment' and unfavourable levels of cinema access in comparison to metropolitan centres. Using the rhetoric of social and cultural revitalization it asserted the community development potential

4. For more information on community cultural development in Australia see http://www.ccd.net/.

5. RANSW incorporates representative regional arts boards who, jointly with local councils, employ regional arts development officers (RADOs).

of local cinema activity (Ritchie 1996: 5). The Report proposed several options for the amelioration of cinema culture in regional towns, making a clear link between the anecdotal demand for access to cinema in regional locations, non-commercial cinema precedents,[6] and the potential to revive under-utilized cinema infrastructure remnant from the 1920s and 1930s. It suggested that the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW (LGSA) survey cinema access and demand in regional NSW, and proposed a forum where stakeholders could discuss further solutions. Both recommendations came to fruition.

The claims of the *Report on Regional Cinema* were supported by the subsequent LGSA survey results, which revealed two things in relation to rural and regional cinema. First, that access to cinema was the leisure activity most desired by those surveyed, and second, that over 50 per cent of country towns had little or no access to cinema (Smith 2001: 50). In response, a regional cinema working party (RCWP) was formed with representatives from divergent NSW government agencies – the NSW Ministry for the Arts; Regional Arts NSW; the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW; the NSW Department of State and Regional Development; and the NSW Film and Television Office (FTO) – symbolizing the cross-over of concerns of cultural and regional policy-makers. Two regional cinema conferences, in 1998 and 1999, brought together stakeholders from various government agencies, exhibition industry professionals and community representatives either involved or interested in operating cinemas in rural and regional NSW (Smith 2001: 51). A programme with a modest annual cost of $100,000 was established and in 2000 a regional cinema officer (RCO) was appointed at the Film and Television Office to develop and disseminate resources intended to encourage and facilitate cinema activity in regional NSW.[7]

In 2004, RCP files showed that of over forty community-run cinemas operating in NSW, fifteen had been established since the RCP began operation in 1998 (NSW Film and Television Office 2004b), and a 2005 FTO survey returned the findings that '67% of towns with a population greater than 1000 have an operational cinema, and a further 13% of towns of this size are within 40 kilometres of the nearest commercial or community cinema' (NSW Film and Television Office 2006: 30). Projects have received financial support through local fundraising, local government contributions, grants from the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP), the NSW Heritage Office, and federal funding through the Regional Partnerships Program of the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTaRS).

RCP policy rhetoric of community

This brief account of the RCP raises useful questions for scholars of Australian cultural policy, whose attention has been more commonly diverted to the vexed question of the Australian film production industry. Why, for example, is cinema exhibition now receiving government support? RCP policy rhetoric differs strikingly from the usual commercial focus of film agency discussions of market opportunity for Australian producers, instead tapping into popular rhetorical constructions focusing on access and equity among Australian audiences. The regional cinema solution

6. Community cinemas were already successfully operating in a number of NSW country towns including Leeton, Tumut and Glen Innes.

7. The RCP funding was reduced in the 2005–06 financial year – the annual budget is now $50,000 (NSW Film and Television Office 2006: 15) – and the RCO position was reduced to a half-time position (Smith 2006).

appealed to many of the key concerns common to regional, social and cultural policy-making of its time, redressing comparative regional disadvantage and declining service provision. Regional cinema revival was discursively equated with social and cultural well-being, but the most stridently asserted pretext for the RCP was its contribution to the development of 'community': cinema access fostered 'community health and wellbeing' (NSW Film and Television Office 2004b).

In terms of RCP rhetoric, claims made for cinema-related community outcomes include some predictable arguments – that in a very basic sense, cinema provides an opportunity for social interaction – but the capabilities attributed to cinema also extend to more unexpected benefits. According to the RCO, cinema provides an outlet for potentially misdirected energies of local youth, giving them something to do, and contributing to lower crime rates, and is even credited with improving health itself. A favoured RCP example is that of Nundle where cinema activity was initiated by the local area health nurse. The RCO observed that this project provided 'a significant focus for rebuilding community spirit' and 'most importantly […] established for the first time a link between cinema and community health' (Smith 2001: 51). The argument appears effective: in late 2004 the RCP received a NSW Premier's Public Sector Award (Bronze) – in the 'Services to Rural NSW' category – over projects from the Ambulance Service of NSW, the Far West Area Health Service and WorkCover NSW (NSW Film and Television Office 2004b). The establishment of a moral equivalence between cinema and these health-based agencies is significant, if a little surprising.

But does this equate to community-building? Is it the case that resumed access to cinema can deliver the promised objective of enhanced community? While RCP rhetoric presents cinema as potentially beneficial to community 'health' in a literal sense, Hawkes argues that key generators of community are feelings of identification, of 'connectedness' and 'belonging', that 'the process of arriving at collective meanings is central to the health of a community […]' (Hawkes 2001: 13). Does cinema-going inspire a common purpose or individual sense of belonging? Does the implication of unity and inclusion inherent in the term 'community' operate to marginalize or mask experiences of difference or exclusion (Young 1990; Watt 1991: 58)?

Cinema and community: the Tumut case study

In March 2005, I spent a week in Tumut, a town with a community-restored cinema, the Montreal. Whilst there I attended a cinema screening, conducted participant observation, compiled archival research and co-produced semi-structured interviews with 21 people: 6 Montreal management committee members; 5 cinema volunteers; and 10 people whose primary identity is not invested in the cinema. Strategically, I chose not to reveal my interest in concepts of community, nevertheless I found discourses of community operating widely in Tumut, informing people's constructions and performances of self in relation to the cinema, but also inflecting their understandings of themselves in the local context generally. It is possible that the articulations and experiences of collective purpose associated with the Montreal's restoration have contributed to a heightened significance and usage of the term 'community' in Tumut.

Tumut is a mill town with a population of approximately 6000, located at the northern end of the Kosciuszko National Park in southern NSW. Tumut's only purpose-built theatre, the Montreal, opened in 1930. The 'Mont', as it is affectionately known, operated continuously until 1970 and between then and 1994 attempts to revive it commercially were unsuccessful. When it was offered for sale in 1993 concerns about the loss of the building as a feature of the local landscape and a cultural facility inspired a local group to begin a campaign to 'save' it – collectively to purchase, preserve and operate the cinema on a non-commercial basis. Successfully lobbying for funds from a local philanthropic foundation established to 'benefit the town' of Tumut required a strong case for the importance of the cinema. A public appeal also raised $AUD 40,000 – indicating that appeals to its relevance found wide resonance with a significant number of local people.

The Montreal bears the name in anagram of its founder John Learmont – a historic example of the mutual constitution of identities of the building and those who have a relationship with it. That he continued with construction of the cinema after the onset of the Depression is widely remembered in Tumut as a discharge of community duty. This characterization of the cinema as something built 'for the people' sits well with its recent history, functioning to provide contemporary cinema discourses of community with a certain precedence and therefore legitimacy. As the subject of collective aspiration and action during fundraising and restoration campaigns, the Montreal became associated with many meanings of community – made explicit in the cinema's new name: the Montreal Community Theatre. This venue is now operated as a non-profit, volunteer-managed multi-purpose theatre. A management committee numbering approximately twelve people oversee operations, a pool of volunteers from within and beyond the committee sell tickets and perform ushering duties at every screening, and a small payment is made to reimburse travel costs incurred by a volunteer projectionist. Although in its non-profit incarnation the auditorium is also used for theatre, concerts and conferences – and Tumut residents show great enthusiasm for these alternative activities – the theatre has always been primarily associated with cinema and its most regular events remain film screenings.

The Montreal shows films once weekly, with additional screenings scheduled for children's titles and during school holidays. Programming decisions are discussed at management committee meetings with all able to make and debate title suggestions. In theory the members of the committee could also act as a conduit for ideas from the wider community, although anecdotally this rarely occurs in relation to programming. Programming choices vary enormously – the night I attended the Montreal, *Ladder 49* (Russell, 2004), a fairly generic Hollywood movie, played to a small crowd of 14, but attendance records show that titles such as *Shrek 2* (Adamson, Asbury and Vernon, 2004) and *Meet the Fockers* (Roach, 2004) can attract over 200 to a screening (Montreal Community Theatre Inc. 2005). During a later follow-up visit to Tumut in June 2006 the cinema was screening a mixture of children's and cross-over titles, with *Ice Age: The Meltdown* (Saldanha, 2006) and *Lassie* (Sturridge, 2005) balanced by *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005) and *The World's Fastest Indian*

(Donaldson, 2005). Significantly no Australian films appeared on the Montreal's programme, revealing an unsurprising international focus in this example of self-programming. While RCP philosophy has clearly been to enable localized cinema projects and choices, community cinemas may be considered an under-utilized regional exhibition resource for film policy-makers with nationalist agendas. The AFC's Regional Digital Screen Network (RDSN), which services eight cinemas nationally, has installed digital equipment in a commercial cinema in nearby Wagga Wagga. While this places Tumut residents in closer proximity to the RDSN than most Australians, it is still an expensive and inconvenient one-hour drive away.

At $AUD 10 full and $AUD 8 concession, Montreal ticket prices are cheaper than commercial multiplex standards, in recognition that films can only be obtained by such small and remote operations on second-run release, but also with the issue of affordability and access in mind. This theatre was used by the RCP as an inspiration, model and mentor for new projects, and it is therefore possible to consider how an exemplar of a cinema operating in the service of a community is perceived by those with more direct experience of its restoration and current operation.

Community discourses

Tumut Resident 1 (TR1), a volunteer usher, was keen to be interviewed after her Friday-night shift at the cinema. Very early in our conversation, before any mention was made of the Montreal Theatre, when I asked how important going to the cinema had been in her life, she replied:

> Well, I do love the movies, but I suppose the cinema, Tumut Montreal Theatre, I'm sort of passionate for, because a lot of people spent a lot of time restoring it and making it a going theatre for our community against all odds, and I now usher purely just to keep it going and to be part of that community involvement. I do it for my community.
>
> (Tumut Resident 1 2005)

TR1's relationship with the Montreal is not primarily concerned with 'the movies', and it is tempting to conclude that the building itself also has no particular relevance. Instead, repeated emphasis indicates that 'community' – understood as collective effort, as a localized social group, and a concept with which she feels connected – is in her mind the primary objective and achievement of the cinema's restoration, and of her own involvement in its ongoing operation. TR1 had already cited 'community life' as a reason why she likes living in Tumut, and the cinema provides her with a site through which to actively identify and construct meanings of community and feelings of belonging. Her identification also extends to the civic level: asked what it's like living there she replied, 'I'm a dedicated person to Tumut'.

When drafting interview questions I aimed to explore people's accounts of their memories, stories and practices relating to the restored cinema, but due to my interest in feelings of belonging I was also interested in accessing people's accounts of their emotional responses to the cinema. With this objective in mind, one of the things I specifically made a point of asking interviewees was about how their experiences of the cinema

made them feel. When I asked TR1 how walking through the theatre doors made her feel, she responded, 'At home'. This sentiment was shared by a number of other people who were involved in the cinema as volunteers. Tumut Resident 2 (TR2), a member of the theatre's management committee, clearly conveyed the mutual constitution of identities common in personal accounts of the cinema, showing a conflation of self, community and cinema, and a clear sense of both social and spatial belonging:

> When I'm on my own, at night, when you turn the lights on in the theatre I feel pretty special. I think it is you, it's part of you, part of the community, it's also part of you and you've helped to make that exist as well... It's the most comfortable place, I'm very at home there and I think to have that in such a huge building is unusual.
>
> (Tumut Resident 2 2005)

TR2's involvement in the practices of cinema revitalization and operation have enhanced her experience of a sense of belonging, and the extent of her comfort and familiarity within the cinema space is tellingly revealed in her reflection that she's 'very at home there'. Geographers have theorized that home can be understood as both a place and a spatial imaginary that is often imbued with feelings 'of belonging, desire and intimacy' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 2). As in this comment, these individual experiences of belonging are often extrapolated through discourses that evoke both the community and the cinema as single, inclusive entities. While it appears that the most intense experiences of belonging are experienced by those with an active investment in the cinema's success, variations on the observation, 'the cinema is now owned by everyone' are often asserted in Tumut.

While the cinema may be most effectively serving the needs for identification and connection in those who are directly involved in its operations, rhetorical extension of the cinema's relevance to the *wider* community is also a common feature of country cinema discourses. When I asked Tumut Resident 3 (TR3), a cinema preservation campaign instigator, if she felt a sense of responsibility for the theatre, she replied:

> It's very much a sense of that responsibility but it's also an incredible sense of pride of how far we have come, what we've managed to achieve and the sense that it's been done as a whole community, this whole community makes the Montreal possible and it only continues to be possible because they continue to support it.
>
> (Tumut Resident 3 2005)

There is an element of strategic coercion in the final part of this statement, demonstrating use of 'the whole' and the concept of community to appeal to local people for support. On the one hand this indicates that it may be the collective commitment to a project, the cinema restoration campaign itself, rather than the material site of the cinema or the social experience of cinema-going, which generates the strongest identifications and feelings of community.

On the other hand, it also suggests that discourses of community and pride have a capacity to conceal dissent through hegemonic containment –

there is no alternative position available except outright rejection of the concept of the community. As Raymond Williams observed of the term community: '[…] unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term' (Williams cited in Watt 1991: 56). Is it not possible that there are local people who do not feel pride in relation to the Montreal? Or who oppose the allocation of resources to the cinema? Tumut Resident 4 (TR4), a shire councillor who I went to for an alternative viewpoint that favours the provision of roads rather than cultural assets, chose not to be drawn on the issue, closing our short discussion with 'we're all very proud of it' demonstrating the presentation of pride as a discursive foreclosure to the articulation of dissent (Tumut Resident 4 2005).

This echoes the official Council stance on the theatre. Demonstrating the application of social and cultural planning philosophies espoused by authors such as Hawkes and Florida, Tumut Shire Council's promotional brochure *Tumut Region: Developing Naturally* lists the Montreal Community Theatre amongst local attractions of leisure and lifestyle. Tumut Resident 5 (TR5), the general manager of Tumut Council, additionally identified the potential for the cinema to attract desirable demographic groups:

> We're having to present ourselves as a town suitable for graduates to come and live with their families, they tend to be looking for a certain type of lifestyle […] having that theatre there is just a wonderful way to present our town. […] We've had a fear ever since [the timber] industry started to ramp up that our town was going to be turned into an industrial town, so for the last five or six years we've been consciously trying to promote the cultural side of things because we don't want to gain economic development at the expense of losing Tumut and what traditionally has been Tumut and all its values, and I think the Montreal is a key part of trying to retain the cultural identity of Tumut, a very important part of it.
>
> (Tumut Resident 5 2005)

The Council are rhetorically supportive of the theatre's restoration and ongoing operation, have their own investment in its retention, and play a role in the current set-up by holding the title of the property in trust and leasing the theatre back to the management committee for a 'peppercorn' rent. However, their stance endorses the neo-liberal philosophy that the facility should continue to be managed and operated by volunteer community labour:

> I rather feel that the success of the community theatre has been largely due to the fact that it has been a community committee. As far as operations go the theatre becomes a very small part of the overall level of service that we offer. Council wouldn't have the resources or the emphasis to keep it where it's at, it really does rely on that community enthusiasm to keep it at that level.
>
> (Tumut Resident 5 2005)

Here the evocation of local identities is extended to community, but the definition applied to community in this statement seems limited in meaning to non-Council, and is being used in this context to deflect responsibility for the ongoing maintenance and operation of the Montreal away from the Council.

Counter discourses

Articulations like those made by TR1, TR2 and TR3 were most common amongst those directly involved in the cinema, and all interviewees were aware of the connection between the cinema and the community. Interviewees not centrally associated with the cinema made less frequent or enthusiastic allusion to collective meanings of community, but only two interviewees directly contested those meanings. Although these counter-narratives were more limited in their circulation, I came to realize that there did exist in Tumut some more ambiguous and troubled experiences of belonging. Both contestations concern the issue of access so important to RCP rhetoric, and in my own experience of the theatre I also held an ambivalent opinion about access to the cinema. On my arrival in Tumut I was given a key to the theatre as a place in which to conduct interviews. I learnt that all management committee members hold keys to the theatre and my initial impression was of wide general accessibility. I thought that if I could be offered a key to access the cinema as required that it must be an open and democratic space, used often and for many purposes. However, I found that although I offered the theatre to all research participants as a potential meeting place, the only interviews I conducted there were with volunteers during or just following their shifts. All other interviewees preferred me to visit them in their houses and, apart from the weekly screening, the cinema remained locked and unused for the rest of the week. On hearing a committee member complain that the number of keys 'floating around' required close management and should be reduced, I began to suspect that I had simply been the recipient of goodwill and generosity, and that access occurred on a rather more selective basis than I had first imagined.

This view was strengthened by the stories of research participants who challenged representations of the cinema as an inclusive space. Tumut Resident 6 (TR6) complained that prohibitive hire fees for the theatre restricted general community usage, believing that a space thought of as a community space should be made available for events like fundraisers at more reasonable rates. Another voiced my private observations regarding key management describing them as a system of 'key-holding' and 'gatekeeping', which operated to restrict access to the theatre.

Tumut Resident 7 (TR7) is a relatively recent resident of Tumut, who volunteers as an usher at the Montreal but has retired from her position on the management committee due to frustrations over perceived exclusions. Her interpretation of the retention of barbed wire atop the Montreal's fence perimeter reflected her own concerns about access:

> I always interpret what a place thinks about itself from its built environment and for me the cyclone fencing with the barbed wire down the side arm of the theatre tells you about ownership and locking. […] I think for that not to have been addressed in its ten years of life is still a remnant of how the people who hold the keys think. […] That type of reflection about who's allowed in and what are we frightened of, you know fears of vandalism etc. etc. that tells me that perhaps this isn't owned by all of the people.
>
> (Tumut Resident 7 2005)

These alternative readings of the cinema space, focusing on division and locking, challenge central claims of community cinema discourses: accessibility, collective ownership and community relevance.

However, as Liepins (2000b: 336) has observed, '"community" spaces can be contested or developed as key resources to be safeguarded'. The material barriers and operational practices which TR7 experiences as mechanisms of exclusion could equally be understood as mechanisms of protection of a cherished community asset. The Montreal has provided TR7 herself with conflicting experiences of belonging since her arrival in Tumut. She has many positive experiences of the cinema to relate, describing in her interview how the cinema offered her an entry point into local life, and an immediate experience of personal involvement and inclusion:

> We're very new residents to Tumut, how it's measured locally in this region. […] The theatre was one of the few joys that I found on our move here, and in the first week of residency I contacted the theatre and asked could I become a friend of the Montreal and also that I was interested in volunteering. So immediately I was stepped up into their volunteering capacities.
>
> (Tumut Resident 7 2005)

TR7's conflicting experiences support discursive claims of community, and at the same time critique their relevance. As in many country towns, the arrival of 'treechangers'[8] is highlighting the difference between urban and rural experiences, and introducing a new dimension to conflicts over collective local identities which echo the concerns about the impact of local industrial change on concepts of civic identity identified by the town's General Manager. TR3, for example, indicates that she understands her sense of local and collective belonging as hers by birthright:

> I'm 36 years old and I'm a mother of three daughters and I'm very proud to be a part of this community and the Montreal Theatre.
> Interviewer: Is it your family town?
> I was born in Tumut and very much have grown up, very much part of the community.
>
> (Tumut Resident 3 2005)

This does not necessarily preclude newcomers from developing a sense of belonging, but they will struggle to attain the legitimacy provided by the link to the past that also gives the Learmont/Montreal genesis narrative such power. TR7 faces the more challenging position of relocation. As a result, her comments in interview reveal a sensitive and heightened understanding and appreciation of the role that this cinema has played in her experience of trying to belong locally.

Conclusions

Both positive and critical reflections of cinema-going in Tumut were framed by discourses of community, demonstrating the primacy of this concept in relation to local understandings of the cinema. These discourses have genuinely contributed to the way people understand themselves, their connection

8. From 'sea-change'; in Australia the term refers to mainly city-dwellers who move to inland country areas.

to others and their relationship with the cinema, and it is not my aim to invalidate those experiences. Recent theorizations of community 'recognize (sic) that imagined communities are fluid and contested but are still important to their "members" and have wider political meanings' (Valentine 2001: 105). Nonetheless, Liepins (2000a: 31) asserts that '"community" must be analysed for the diversities, silences, gaps and marginalisations that simultaneously occur even while some people engaged with a "community" may believe a communal set of understandings and relations are being held'.

One of the central findings of historical scholarship into cinema-going has been that the cinema is a multiply-configured place that has meaning for many different people, holding different memories, experiences, values and visions (Huggett and Bowles 2004; Srinivas 2000). Liepins (2000b: 337) has written elsewhere that '"communities" are as much dynamic phenomena in perpetual process as they are in any sense "permanent" social structures'. If we accept that communities are complex, fluid constructs in process, then community cinemas can be thought of as spaces where meanings of community are constructed, contested and reconstructed, an experience reiterated by more recent restoration projects. For example, the project manager of the restoration of the Bowraville Theatre in north-east NSW has argued that the reconstitution of the cinema also represents a reconstitution of precedent definitions of community:

> The building, and the events which it hosts, are 'sites' in which these contestations and affirmations are played out. Sam Raymond's use of the theatre was as a privately-owned, and physically segregated, business that just screened films. With these new uses of the building which we are adapting to local needs, we are breaking down restrictions between traditional spheres, actively renegotiating the boundaries between entertainment and education, producer and consumer, cast and audience, black and white. We hope that transforming and undermining these distinctions opens up new possibilities, and improves the connection between representation and participation of people. I believe that the new uses of the theatre have begun to engender a new form of community identity.
>
> (Milner 2006)

What may be important is that in the formation of these 'new' communities, new contestations are also able to be articulated. In Tumut, TR7's attempts to contribute to place-making have been restricted by the singular and unproblematic discourse of community, discourses also evident in RCP policy rhetoric. Counter-discourses of difference and exclusion are contained, in part, by repeated public expressions of community pride. Amongst my case studies, it is only in Bowraville, a former mission town where racial and social divisions are highly visible and politically charged, that contestations of claims to community have, to a degree, been welcomed. In Tumut, systems of keyholding and gatekeeping appear in practice to reflect the discursive constraints that safeguard the acceptable meanings of community that the cinema represents.

It is important for scholars of Australian cinema-going, and cultural policy-makers, to recognize that there is significant slippage between the

way cinema is talked about both in a disciplinary and policy sense, and the way it is engaged with in everyday settings. With regard to the NSW regional cinema revival, both campaign and policy discourses have chosen to exaggerate the relevance of cinema-going to the community in order to explain and elicit public support for a traditionally commercial activity. This discursive alignment of cinema-going with community outcomes has endowed these projects with a degree of political legitimacy and for the first time a realm, which has traditionally been left to market forces, has been adopted as an interest of the state.

References

ABS (2006), 'Cultural Funding by Government, Australia, 2004–05 (Reissue)', Catalogue no. 4183.0, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ Lookup/ 4183.0Main+Features12004-05%20(Reissue)?OpenDocument.
Accessed 13 March 2007.

Allen, R.C. (2006), 'Relocating American Film History: The 'Problem' of the Empirical', *Cultural Studies*, 20: 1, pp. 48–88.

Anon. (2006), 'National Regional Arts Summit', *Artreach*, Spring, pp. 4–5.

Australia Council (1997), *Better Places, Richer Communities: Cultural Planning and Local Development – A Practical Guide*, Sydney: Australia Council.

Blunt, A. and Dowling, R. (2006), *Home*, New York: Routledge.

Cavaye, J.M. (2000), *The Role of Government in Community Capacity Building*, Brisbane: Queensland Government, http://www.communitydevelopment.com.au/Documents/The%20Role%20of%20Government%20in%20Community%20Capacity%20Building.pdf.
Accessed 20 March 2007.

Elkington, J. (1998), *Cannibals With Forks: The Triple-Bottom-Line of 21st Century Business*, Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

Florida, R. (2002), *The Rise of the Creative Class, and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books.

Fuller, K.H. (1996), *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Gibson, C. and Klocker, N. (2005), 'The "Cultural Turn" in Australian Regional Economic Development Discourse: Neoliberalising Creativity?', *Geographical Research*, 43: 1, pp. 93–102.

Gzell, I. (2001), 'Platforming: Incubator for Current + Potential RAB Members', paper presented to the Culture@com.unity: the Arts and Cultural Domain in New South Wales conference, Sydney, 5–6 October.

Hawkes, J. (2001), *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning*, Melbourne: Common Ground Publishing and Community Cultural Development Network (Victoria).

Hubbard, P. (2000), 'The Social Geographies of Cinema', http://www.staff.lboro.ac.uk/%7Egypjh/cinema.html.
Accessed 24 March 2007.

Huggett N. and Bowles, K. (2004), 'Cowboys, Jaffas and Pies: Researching Cinema-going in the Illawarra', in M. Stokes and R. Maltby (eds), *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, London: British Film Institute.

Jancovich, M. and Faire, L. with Stubbings, S. (2003), *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, London: British Film Institute.

Jones, J. (2003), *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall and Resurrection*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Jopson, D. (1999), 'Heart Ripped out of Country Towns', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June, p. 4.

Kenyon, P. and Black, A. (eds) (2001), *Small Town Renewal: Overview and Case Studies*, report to the Australian Government Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/HCC/01-043.pdf. Accessed 19 March 2007.

Liepins, R. (2000a), 'New Energies for an Old Idea: Reworking Approaches to "Community" in Contemporary Rural Studies', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16: 1, pp. 23–35.

—— (2000b), 'Exploring Rurality Through "Community": Discourses, Practices and Spaces Shaping Australian and New Zealand Rural "Communities"', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16: 3, pp. 325–41.

Macdonnell, J. (1997), *50 Years in the Bush*, Sydney: Currency Press/Arts Council of NSW.

Maddox, G. (2007), 'Luhrmann Hails Budget Boost for Film "Stunning"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May, http://www.smh.com.au/news/books/luhrmann-hails-budget-boost-for-film-stunning/2007/05/09/1178390393902.html. Accessed 21 June 2007.

Maltby, R. (2006), 'Cinema in Context: On the Prospect of Writing Cinema History from Below', in I. Blom and W. Strauven (eds), *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 9: 2, pp. 74–96.

McManus, P. and Pritchard, B. (2000), 'Introduction', in P. McManus and B. Pritchard (eds), *Land of Discontent: The Dynamics of Change in Rural and Regional Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press, pp. 1–13.

Mills, D. (2003), 'Cultural Planning – Policy Task, not Tool', *Artwork Magazine*, 55, pp. 7–11.

—— (2005), 'Cultural Strategies for Local Planning', paper presented to 'A Shared Journey: Social Planning for the Bega Valley Shire and Beyond' conference, Bega, NSW Australia, 17–18 March, http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au/community/social_plan/Mills.pdf.
Accessed 19 March 2007.

Milner, L. (2006), 'A Changing Community: Bowraville and its Theatre', paper presented to the 13th Biennial Conference of the Film and History Association of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, Australia, 16–19 November.

Montreal Community Theatre Inc. (2005), *Sales by Item Summary*, Tumut.

NSW Film and Television Office (2004a), 'Cinema in Regional NSW – The Story So Far', http://www.fto.nsw.gov.au/fund.asp?content=2&subID=8&id=53&infoID =97.
Accessed 14 November 2004.

—— (2004b), 'FTO Receives NSW Premier's Award for Regional Cinema Program', http://www.fto.nsw.gov.au/content.asp?content=3&Id=328.
Accessed 15 March 2007.

—— (2006), *Annual Report 2005–2006*, http://www.fto.nsw.gov.au/sysfiles/attachment/AR_2005-2006.pdf.
Accessed 24 March 2007.

NSW Government (n.d.), 'Communitybuilders.nsw', http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/. Accessed 19 March 2007.

NSW Ministry for the Arts and NSW Department of Local Government (2004), *Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government*, http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/CPG-final.pdf.
Accessed 16 March 2007.

Reddel, T. (2002), 'Beyond Participation, Hierarchies, Management and Markets: "New" Governance and Place Policies', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 61: 1, pp. 50–63.

Ritchie, J. (1996), *Report on Regional Cinema*, report to the NSW Minister assisting the Minister for the Arts, NSW State Government, Glen Innes: Arts North West.

Smith, B. (2001), 'Bringing the Movies Back to the Country: Regional Cinema in NSW', *Metro*, 127–28 (Autumn/Winter), pp. 50–52.

Srinivas, S.V. (2000), 'Is There a Public in the Cinema Hall?', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 42, http://www.frameworkonline.com/42svs.htm. Accessed 27 March 2007.

Stephens, U. (2001), *Strengthening Rural Communities: Resource Kit*, Sydney: NSW Premier's Department.

South Australia's Strategic Plan Audit Committee (2006), *South Australia's Strategic Plan Progress Report*, http://www.stateplan.sa.gov.au/documents/SASPProgressReport_June2006_ExecutiveSummaryandIntroduction.pdf. Accessed 12 March 2007.

Tomsic, M. (2004), 'Women's Memories of Cinema-going: More Than "The Only Thing Left To Do" in Victoria's Western District', *History Australia*, 2: 1, pp. 1–11.

Valentine, G. (2001), *Social Geographies: Space and Society*, New York: Prentice Hall.

Vincent, R. (2006), 'Buildings Matter', *ArtReach*, Autumn, pp. 6–9.

Waller, G.A. (ed.) (2002), *Moviegoing in America*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Watt, D. (1991), 'Interrogating "Community": Social Welfare Versus Cultural Democracy', in V. Binns (ed.), *Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice*, Sydney: Pluto Press, pp. 55–66.

Winter I. (2000), 'Social Capital and Public Policy in Context', in I. Winter (ed.), *Social Capital and Public Policy in Australia*, Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, pp. 1–16.

Young. I.M. (1990), 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference', in L.J. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, pp. 300–23.

Oral history interviews cited

Tumut Resident 1 (2005), Interview with Karen Crowe, 5 March.

Tumut Resident 2 (2005), Interview with Karen Crowe, 9 March.

Tumut Resident 3 (2005), Interview with Karen Crowe, 9 March.

Tumut Resident 4 (2005), Interview with Karen Crowe, 7 March.

Tumut Resident 5 (2005), Interview with Karen Crowe, 7 March.

Tumut Resident 7 (2005), Interview with Karen Crowe, 8 March.

Suggested citation

Crowe, K. (2007), 'Cinema, community and policy: contexts and pretexts for the Regional Cinema Program in New South Wales, Australia', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 1: 3, pp. 377–394. doi: 10.1386/sac.1.3.377/1

Contributor details

Karen Crowe is a Ph.D. student at the University of Wollongong researching the relationship between cinema-going and concepts of 'community' in regional New South Wales. Contact: School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, Northfields Avenue, NSW, 2522, Australia. E-mail: klc912@uow.edu.au

Index – Volume 1

Bennett, J., Head on: multicultural representations of Australian identity in 1990's cinema, pp. 61–78.

Bowles, K., 'Three miles of rough dirt road': towards an audience-centred approach to cinema studies in Australia, pp. 245–260.

Craven, I., Historicizing transition in Australian cinema: the moment of Emerald City, pp. 29–46.

Crowe, K., Cinema, community and policy: contexts and pretexts for the Regional Cinema, Program in New South Wales, Australia pp. 377–394.

Cryle, D., and Johansen, G., Exploiting the regional Queensland audience: Birch Carroll and Coyle's Wintergarden theatres, 1925–35, pp. 333–351.

Davis, T., Remembering our ancestors: cross-cultural collaboration and the mediation of Aboriginal culture and history in *Ten Canoes* (Rolf de Heer, 2006), pp. 5–14.

De Souza, P., *Maoritanga* in *Whale Rider* and *Once Were Warriors*: a problematic rebirth through female leaders, pp. 15–27.

Hamby, L., Thomson Times and *Ten Canoes* (de Heer and Djigirr, 2006), pp. 127–146.

Huggett, N., Everyone was watching! Strategies of self-presentation in oral histories of cinema-going, pp. 261–274.

Hurley, A., Whose Dreaming? Intercultural appropriation, representations of Aboriginality, and the process of film-making in Werner Herzog's *Where the Green AntsDream* (1983), pp. 175–190.

Lamond, J., *Dad Rudd, M.P.* and the making of a national audience, pp. 91–105.

Martin, A., Lessons of noise and silence: avant-garde cinema and experimental music in Australia, pp. 223–234.

McDonnell, B., The physician who assumed his patient's fever: Peter Jackson's narrative strategy in *Heavenly Creatures,* pp. 161–173.

Mould, O., Mission impossible? Reconsidering the research into Sydney's film industry, pp. 47–60.

Murray, S., Activism, community and governance: Barry Barclay's *The Kaipara Affair* (2005), pp. 147–159.

Rando, G., Liminality, temporality and marginalization in Giorgio Mangiamele's migrant movies, pp. 209–221.

Rayner, J., Live and dangerous? The screen life of Steve Irwin, pp. 107–117.

Thorne, R., Rethinking distribution: developing the parameters for a micro-analysis of the movement of motion pictures, pp. 315–331.

Verhoeven, D., Twice born: Dionysos Films and the establishment of a Greek film circuit in Australia, pp. 275–298.

Walker, D., Rural cinema audiences in South Australia in the 1930s, pp. 353–375.

Walsh, M.,Cinema in a small state: distribution and exhibition in Adelaide at the coming of sound, pp. 299–313.

Williams, D., *The Overlanders*: between nations, pp. 79–89.

Wilson, J., Reconsidering Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978): the screen adaptation of Thomas Keneally's novel (1972), pp. 191–207.

Studies in
Australasian Cinema
Volume 1 Number 3 – 2007

243–244 **Editorial**
Deb Verhoeven

Articles

245–260 `Three miles of rough dirt road': towards an audience-centred approach to cinema studies in Australia
Kate Bowles

261–274 Everyone was watching! Strategies of self-presentation in oral histories of cinema-going
Nancy Huggett

275–298 Twice born: Dionysos Films and the establishment of a Greek film circuit in Australia
Deb Verhoeven

299–313 Cinema in a small state: distribution and exhibition in Adelaide at the coming of sound
Mike Walsh

315–331 Rethinking distribution: developing the parameters for a micro-analysis of the movement of motion pictures
Ross Thorne

333–351 Exploiting the regional Queensland audience: Birch Carroll and Coyle's Wintergarden theatres, 1925–35
Denis Cryle and Grace Johansen

353–375 Rural cinema audiences in South Australia in the 1930s
Dylan Walker

377–394 Cinema, community and policy: contexts and pretexts for the Regional Cinema Program in New South Wales, Australia
Karen Crowe

395 **Index**

ISSN 1750-3175
9 771750 317007 13

www.intellectbooks.com